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THE RELIGION OF THE COMMON MAN

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THE RELIGION

OF

THE COMMON MAN

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE PATTERN NATION," ETC. ETC.

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PREFACE

THE question whether the foundation principle of religion, that there is a God whom men ought to worship, is based upon truth, has often been discussed in our time. In this inquiry there is nothing new, since it has engaged the mind of man ever since the dawn of human thought. What is new now is, that it is no longer confined to philosophers and theologians, but has been brought down among the crowd, is ventilated in cheap literature, and debated by popular speakers at Sunday gatherings in the parks. All free discussion must produce some error, and especially so in such a subject as this, where any man can ask a question which no

man can answer, and where the talk of the streets can propound problems, and also pronounce upon them, which the Imperial thinkers of the race have pondered over for ages. And sometimes, taking a first-impression view of things, it would seem as if this surface discussion of religion had so discredited it, and indeed its object, the Creator too, that little was left for mankind but to tacitly discard it and let it quietly die out, like the old faith in Oracles, or the more recent belief in sorcery and witchcraft; while men say, some openly, more in their hearts, that there is no God.

But such a view of the subject would be a mistake. The fact is that Religion has reality behind it, and is indestructible in the heart of man. Hence it survives the attacks of its foes, and the mistakes of its friends, and also the revelations of science, though they destroy primitive beliefs which

used to be considered necessary for its support. And it remains to-day still a living force among us, responding to a natural instinct of the heart for communion with its Creator, and supplying a needful support to mankind in the stress of life. Not a few plain men realise this fact for themselves, and are satisfied that there is truth in religion, both from the conclusions of their intellect, and also from the needs of their nature.

The thoughts of these men and the reasons which influence them, though they may lack the finish of the speculations of the philosopher, have a special value of their own, as being the natural product of the mind of plain men, the rough ore of the human intellect, though it be not wrought into perfect shape by the cunning hand of the skilled artificer. Thus if some of the crowd discredit religion, others are true

to it, and as we are among the crowd, we may as well take the voices on both sides.

But these men who hold to religion, attract little notice amidst the din and bustle of the highway. They do not engage the attention which is given to those who raise the flag of revolt, and renounce allegiance to the old standard of faith. So they think on to themselves in silence. But this is not owing to want of mental discernment on their part, or to a craven disposition which quails before free inquiry and the truth, whatever it be, to which it leads. They think out their conclusions quite as earnestly as the innovators, and perhaps more impartially; not being fascinated by the glamour which attaches to novelty, and to the assertion of intellectual superiority over other men, and old beliefs. It may be of value to us to learn something of the thoughts of men

such as these upon this subject, a subject of which that man does not live, who can say that it is no concern of his.

The object of the following pages, then, is to record the reflections and the conclusions of a man of average intellect and ordinary information, as he muses upon and wrestles with the problem of his existence here and his future destiny, and seeks to discover, if not a complete solution of that problem, light at least enough to guide him on his earthly journey. To illustrate his ideas, we have at times made reference to the works of philosophers, with which he himself, possibly, could not claim acquaintance. But throughout, his thoughts are his own. And in the last resort all philosophy, and all metaphysics, must justify itself to the plain mind of mankind.

In these pages we have styled him the "Common Man."

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THE RELIGION OF THE COMMON MAN

CHAPTER I

IS RELIGION DYING OUT?

It is declared in the fifty-third Psalm that "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." It is to be observed that in David's time, if David be the author of this psalm, the imputation against the foolish person is, not that he makes open declaration of his disbelief in a Deity, but only that he says it in his heart. And it is probable that in these words the Psalmist truly describes what in the past ages of the world has been the attitude of most of those who were wanting in "wisdom," to use the word in an ancient sense, in regard to the truths of

religion. Such men generally kept their ideas to themselves, and did not openly challenge the public faith in God; nor would they have had much sympathy from their fellow-men in such a defiance of the generally accepted creed. Probably they did not interrogate themselves very closely as to what their ideas on the subject really were, but at least they did not obtrude them upon the public. Such discussion of the subject as there was, the learned carried on among themselves, sometimes in the dead languages, but always in a literature that did not reach the mass of men.

The fact then, that in our time the existence of the Deity, and with it the truth of the religious conception of life, is disbelieved by some in the quiet seclusion of their own personality, need not cause surprise to thoughtful men, and would not call for special comment or investigation. But what does give reason for reflection and some disquietude, is when we see this disbelief in one of the main foundations of human character, proclaimed aloud among

the crowd, and welcomed as some new development of human progress and enlightenment. The difficult, and at times perplexing problems, which are involved in the question of the truth of religion, and which used to tax the strength of the trained intellects of the world, are now passed on to the contention of the market-place. And, since it is not possible to demonstrate, as a matter of logical proof, all the truths upon which religion rests, any more than it is to demonstrate the foundation facts of any science, it is not to be wondered at if the first impression of many is, that what are called the truths of religion are, after all, merely fictions—fancies of the pious mind, destined to disperse, like the impalpable shades of night, before the rising light of the growing knowledge and discernment of modern times.

Various causes, and causes most of which we regard with just satisfaction, despite the difficulties which they induce, have contributed to this result. General education, superficial, as it must necessarily be as far

as this subject is concerned, cheap literature, the free and easy debates of the popular club and the park gathering, private judgment and the disposition which is fostered in times of change to throw off old beliefs, not so much because they have been proved to be untrue, as because they are old,—all these, while they secure the people from ancient superstitions, at the same time leave them faced by the difficulties which freedom, whether civil or religious, always brings with it to temper its blessings. The people have escaped from the despotism of Egypt, but they have still to find their way through the windings of the wilderness.

This application of the principle of equality to the human mind is the latest, and in some respects most serious, phase of its development. To search after truth independently, each man for himself, was not a privilege given to, or shall we say, a burden cast upon, mankind in the past. The philosophers of Greece and Rome, while they smiled at the credulity of the people, yet paid outward homage to the national religion,

and even took part in the ceremonies connected with it. Some of them expressly declare that it is one's duty not to disturb the common faith. In our own country the early school of Freethinkers would have scorned to address their disquieting theories to the crowd. They held that religion was necessary for the people. Hume advised that a young friend of his, who held disbelieving views similar to his own, should nevertheless keep to the Church as a profession, since it offered the best provision for a man of letters. He writes: "It is putting too great a respect upon the vulgar and their superstitions, to pique oneself upon sincerity with regard to them. Did one ever make it a point of honour to speak the truth to children or madmen? I wish it were still in my power to be a hypocrite in this particular."

There is this, at least, to be said for the principle of authority in matters of faith. In the past when some great prophet, or leader of men proclaimed his message to the people, which was by them implicitly

accepted, the most ignorant and simple-minded man in the crowd had the benefit of all the enlightenment which the new faith could confer. The message was supported by all the weight which the personality of the prophet could give to it, and it dealt with a subject which men in general did not, as yet, claim to be able to deal with themselves. "I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have none other Gods but Me." The poorest Israelite of the tribes who thronged round the plain at the base of Sinai, was at once enlightened by this majestic declaration of the unity of the Deity. The flaming mountain, the thunder, the voice from Heaven itself, of which the Jewish legend tells, might give an awful surrounding to the revelation, but they added nothing to the sublime truth itself, which then became the patrimony of the whole people, as much a part of each Israelite's life as if he had discovered it for himself. It remains to the present time the most distinguishing feature in the faith of their descendants. The day of prophets is now left behind us, and each

man is his own prophet. If the masses are now to be inspired they must get the inspiration from themselves. But the fact that religion is now remitted to the judgment of the people at large, does not make the problems which lie at its base less difficult to grapple with, than the philosophers of every age have already found them to be. There is nothing worth having but the price must be paid for it. Free discussion, the blessing of our age, while it leads some men to truth, leads other men to error. It is no wonder if a subject which has tasked the intellects of the imperial thinkers of the world, should prove perplexing to the casual debater in the street. If there is no royal road to learning, there is no public highway to truth.

The difficulties, too, of religion, it must be admitted, have been increased by the false positions which its friends have taken up in the past, and which have, one after another, had to be abandoned before the onward sweep of knowledge. In the name of misunderstood revelations, they invaded

the province of science, and disastrously linked the cause of religion to theories about man and Nature, which the advance of knowledge absolutely disproves. It cannot be wondered at if this leaves the impression that the rest of what has been taught in the name of religion will in time be as readily refuted, as have been the false positions which are now abandoned. And in this aspect of the subject, we must add that one of the least recognised, but yet most insidious of the difficulties with which the cause of intelligent Belief has to contend, is, strange to say, religious education itself, —the methods which are too often adopted in the religious education of the young. The subject, no doubt, is a difficult one in which to strike the true medium. But what is the fact? No thinking person now holds that the Bible is literally inspired, or believes in the reality, as facts, of all the narratives which it contains. No Church now demands such a belief. The ancient legends were generally above the level of their age and often embody living truth, but they are legends.

It impairs the value and the meaning of those venerable writings, when we impute to their authors a knowledge of Nature and her mysteries, which it is obvious that Providence had not, in their time, imparted to the sons of men. Yet, we often go on teaching to the young, in the early and confiding years of childhood, a series of narratives as facts, and facts surrounded by the authority of religion, which when they are out of the schoolroom, they find that all men, their parents and teachers included, are agreed in holding to be mythical, and not facts at all. Eve and her apple, once a grim warning to the learner, he discovers to be a subject of pleasantry among his elders. What is the natural, though mistaken conclusion? Simply that the young people, as they begin to think, readily settle down to the conviction, not only that the narratives are myths, but that all which they were taught, as connected with them, is equally illusory. A chilling, dubious feeling of the unreality of religion sets in, a feeling that it is not meant seriously for

grown-up people, but only a make-believe for children. And so a passive condition of unbelief permeates through the young. Thus the cause of Faith becomes discredited, so much so, that, at times, one might think that the foundations of religion themselves were crumbling away.

But all the time we have still the facts of existence to face, and we have human nature to deal with. Man remains the religious animal that he ever was, and the moral and spiritual principle in his nature imperatively demands relations with his Maker. And not less does he, in the emergencies of life, feel practically the need of religion. Even if he would, he cannot wholly free himself from this feeling. Life is such a serious thing, its course is often so perplexing, its events at times so tragic, with its inevitable, yet baffling end in the apparent extinction of the grave,—life is such, this life of ours, that man to bear the burden requires support from above, if he is not to sink into a mere animal existence, and to rest content with

the hopeless philosophy, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." History proves the reality of these factors in human nature. From the infancy of the race onwards, we find man ever seeking for light to reveal to him something of his source and his destiny, and ever struggling to wrest from the eternal Heavens, a response to the promptings of that moral faculty which he finds to be a part of his nature. And the different families of the earth claim to have had inspirations of the truth from God Himself, and these inspirations have moulded the course of successive civilisations. The most living portion of man's history, is that which deals with his development as a moral being. In these aspirations towards his Maker, man differs from the other animals who inhabit this globe. Are all those aspirations vain? Are all the longings of the human heart to have communion with its Source delusions? Has the universal voice of human supplication to Heaven, poured forth in continuing succession from age to age, from civilisation to civilisation,

like one great constant prayer from the race of man to its Creator, no real object to justify or explain it? Is it all at last to end in blank nothingness? If so, then our existence here must be declared to be not merely perplexing, but unmeaning and futile. It would be a mockery of our nature, at the same time that we were given a nature to realise that mockery, and to feel despair at it. The problem of human life would become more inexplicable than ever, and the spectacle of a noble man, devoting his life to virtue and self-sacrifice, would be the most meaningless and unaccountable thing in God's creation.

The outlook of our civilisation then is dreary, if its religion is going to loose its hold upon men. It has no newer development of Christianity to look to. It has not yet lived up to the standard which Christ set before mankind. It possesses the foremost religion of the world, and the alternative of casting it off, is not some new faith, but a delusive Pantheism or a dreary Materialism. Civilisations cannot start afresh in matters

of faith, any more than in other conditions of national life. As for the individual man, his needs remain as much as ever a part of his nature;—the want of some support on which to stay himself in this life, and also the rest for his soul demanded by his spiritual aspirations. These cannot be satisfied by a philosophy of negation or of incredulity, which proposes to wave aside the claims of the human soul and the needs of man in the stress of life, by telling him not to mind them. It is with earnestness, therefore, that the thinking man asks himself the question: "Is it indeed true that there is no God?"

CHAPTER II

THE COMMON MAN

NOTWITHSTANDING the spread of disbelief in our time, and amid all the perplexities which popular speculations upon human life and destiny create, there are still to-day millions of plain men scattered over this globe, who believe in God and worship Him, as far as they know, in truth, and at least with sincerity. These men are not masters of the reasoning by which, among the learned, religion is attacked upon the one side, or defended on the other. They are not familiar with the subtle metaphysical controversies in which man and his soul, and the exterior world, have been involved. To this extent they may be said to be ignorant men. But they have thought earnestly upon

the subject, and the sincere thoughts of the plainest man, grappling with the mystery of his existence, have a value of their own. These men have been led by reasons which appear to them to be sufficient reasons, to believe in God and in His Government of the world, and to have their lives influenced by this belief. The fact that there are millions of such men is in itself a great fact. Even was what they believe not capable of proof, still the fact that a considerable portion of mankind do worship, as they are convinced, their Creator, is one which must challenge the attention of all reflecting men.

It may be instructive if we take the case of one of these Common Men, and try to follow out the reasoning, simple and untutored though it may be, by which he arrives at his momentous conclusions. He does not, for his present purpose, call to his aid the light of revelation, even though he may believe that there has been such a light shed in some form upon mankind; since the inquiry upon which he is now engaged, precedes the question of the message of

revealed religion. He can make no claim to erudition. He misses, probably, in his cogitations the more subtle phases of his subject. Of some of the metaphysical arguments he is ignorant, of others he can only give a simple rendering of the way in which things present themselves to his own mind. Critics may declare that he fails to scientifically handle the problems which he deals with. But the value of his reflections, if value they have, is that they are the natural and sincere musings of a human soul faced by the problems of existence, and struggling to discover some principle of belief on which to rest, which will respond to the instincts of his heart and, at the same time, satisfy the reasonable claims of his understanding. On this raft, a frail one though it be, he hopes to be borne over the "waves of this troublesome life" to the end of his voyage, and through its end, death. The speculations of the philosopher, the discoveries of the man of science, the keen subtleties of the metaphysician, are wonderful things; but there is nothing more wonderful to

contemplate, than the soul of man brought to bay by the facts of existence, which stand imminent before it, and casting about within itself to satisfy its inherent craving for some answer to the problem of the ages—whence its source, and what its destiny?

The first question which presents itself to our Common Man is the great, the fundamental one, whether there is indeed a God, or whether in truth and in fact there is no God;—whether it is a true conclusion that there is one stupendous Power and Intelligence, an infinite and independent Essence, the Source and Preserver of all things; or whether the Universe is the product of, and is impelled by, the unconscious force of material powers, streams of blind impulse, generated we know not how and tending we know not whither? Of the object and meaning of those streams of tendency, he obviously cannot learn anything; since, as they are, on the supposition with which we are dealing, themselves destitute of directing intelligence, it is plain that he cannot discover it in them. The difficulty arises from

a want, not in him, in this case, but in them; not from the feebleness of his nature, but from the blank in theirs. What man naturally aspires to and tries to realise, is some great Intelligence above him, shaping human destiny by methods known to Him, if not to us. Here is something to believe in and to rest in—if indeed it be a fact. Here is something to meet what the soul of man has sought after from the first,—a Power above it, which it can seek to raise itself to and have communion with. But if there is no such Intelligence, then there is nothing for this soul of man to aspire to, and all religion is a myth. All the prayers, and longings, and expectations of men towards God, from the infancy of the race onwards, would be like the doings of some Eastern tribes of which we read, when they seek to save themselves from the effects of an eclipse of the sun. As the eclipse begins they sound horns and beat their tom-toms wildly, in the belief that they will thus dispel the darkness; and when in fact the gloom does pass away, they congratulate themselves upon the success of

their efforts, and also give their gods thanks for blessing their labours.

As for the Common Man, creation is before him; boundless space, the invisible frame of all things, is around him; he is faced by Eternity, he communes with his own soul, and it seems to him that if Creation had not an intelligent source, it must have had an unintelligent one, or have had no source at all. In passing, it may be said that the very ideas of this boundless space and endless time appear to him to demand Deity as their background. He lingers over this first question which arises in his mind, for it seems to him that much is involved in it; indeed, that everything is involved in it. It is like the key to a position on a battle-field. Whoever gets it has won the day, though there may be a good deal of fighting to be done in detail before the whole field is carried. If there is an intelligent Power presiding over the Universe, then not only is religion true generally, but it will be found that most of the postulates of religion naturally follow. For an ancient notion, that

there is an Almighty Power, but that He regards His creation with indifference, leaving it to look after itself; or if observing it at all, rather enjoying the struggles and perplexities of the hapless sons of men,—this notion will be found to be, perhaps, the most untenable of all the many theories upon this momentous subject. Should our Common Man then believe in a Maker and Ruler of the Universe, or should he say in his heart that there is no God? He is aware that the incomprehensible faces him as the ultimate phase of the existence of Deity. But experience has taught him that he must at times "believe" in things which he cannot understand; only it must be something which his intellect recommends to him as a proper subject for belief, for faith. The intellectual authority must bring it before the spiritual, and submit it as a matter properly coming within the spiritual jurisdiction. His whole nature would revolt against being called upon to take to itself a mere futility.

CHAPTER III

UNLETTERED THOUGHT

Our Common Man in his unlettered thoughts on the existence of Deity does not stop to settle the questions raised by the learned, as to how different sources of the idea of God are to be traced in the early history of mankind. How far it is inherent in the human mind; to what extent it is owing to the impressions created in the infancy of the race by the mighty forces of Nature, or by the notion of ghosts and local powers of the air, and how far it was gradually developed out of early and natural systems of many inferior types of Deity,—these and questions such as these, the Common Man, we say, does not undertake to deal with. He is not familiar with the

vast field of interesting research upon them, and it would not affect his convictions if he were. The methods, how far direct or how far gradual, or how far both, which Providence may have chosen to give light to mankind, do not seem to him to be the essential part of the inquiry. The question is, What light have we got? What conclusion ought a thinking man now to arrive at? So he ponders over the problem for himself, with such aid as the accumulated experience of mankind may afford him.

And in his homely cogitations, he starts with the foundation fact that he himself exists. Here, again, he does not involve himself in the learned disquisitions upon this subject, which have perplexed mankind without enlightening them; for, indeed, he is unacquainted with them. He follows out his own natural reasoning upon the matter, and argues from what he feels he has knowledge of. He says to himself, "I think, therefore I am"; not a new idea upon his part, certainly, but one which is as satisfactory to him as it has been to

many others before him. As has been said, he who doubts of everything else cannot doubt that he doubts. And when he says, "I exist," he means to assert this of a dual personality within himself; a body, and a mind which dwells within the body, and also a moral sense which is part of his personality. To tell him that his mind is nothing but an idea corresponding to certain affections of his body, is to make a statement which he is not able to believe; indeed, which he is not able to comprehend the meaning of. Certainly he feels that there is a mysterious sympathy between his body and his mind. When his body is weakened by sickness, his mind is also often affected, though not always so, nor necessarily so; also he learns surprising things about his brain, and the part which it takes in thinking. It appears to him to be a kind of thought organ, but not to create thought, any more than a piano creates the tune that is played on it. As to his body and his mind, he is convinced, so far as he can realise anything, that they are

two distinct things, and not merely dual sides of the one entity. Matter and mind seem to him to be inherently different in their nature. Matter may be changed from one form to another form, as when you burn a piece of paper. Obstruct an electric current, and you make it take the form of light; such is our power over energy to transform it. But you cannot thus manipulate or alter the condition of mind.

Both thinking and sensation lead him to this conclusion. With his body he can only move from place to place, under certain limited conditions. He can project his mind in a moment to some star which is billions and billions of miles distant, and can busy himself in contemplating what he there observes, and realising in his mind the results, as he scrutinises the motion and the constitution of the distant object. And were such a star to be suddenly projected twice the distance from his body, it would make no difference to his mind. In a dream the mind has presented to it and entertains, as in its grasp, things which are distant from

the body, and, in a few seconds, will have drawn out before it the apparent transactions of days or months. He also finds that a great part of his body may be injured, or even destroyed, without his mind being affected. Further, it is common knowledge that the particles of the body are constantly changing and leaving it; so that the body of a man of thirty years of age is not the same substance as it was when he was twenty, nor at forty what it was at thirty, and so on. But his mind is not altered by these changes. It preserves its identity. It is a matter of experience that mind communicates with mind, owing to some mysterious influence, when the two minds are apart from one another, and notwithstanding any material obstacles which may intervene. So it seems to him that his mind and his body are two distinct things, and his moral sense different from both. When he meets a friend and converses with him, he believes that he is conversing not with his friend's body, but with something within his friend's body which animates it; and when his friend

dies and he looks upon his corpse, he is convinced that his friend is not there, but only his "remains." In so thinking he is supported by the universal belief of mankind, that of the philosopher as well as of the peasant. One of the most striking manifestations of religious thought in ancient Greece, had its foundation in the belief in the absolute distinction between the mind and the body. "How shall we bury you?" was the question, Plato tells us, which the disciple Crito asked of his master, just before Socrates took the poison. "As you please," replied the philosopher, "only don't imagine, Crito, that you are burying me, the Socrates who is speaking to you; you can only bury my body. I myself when I drink the poison will bid you good-bye and go away."

"I think, therefore I exist," then, says our Common Man. Taking this as his starting-point, his musings are withal logical, though they do not lead him to absolute knowledge. He finds it to be part of his nature to believe that there is no effect without a cause; and

he also knows that this is the undeviating experience and the universal belief of mankind. He exists, and he finds that he is made up, not only of body and of mind, but also of moral feelings; and he concludes that there must be some superior source from which he and his qualities are derived. The methods by which the superior Power may have seen fit to evolve him or his qualities, mental or moral, seem to him to be a secondary consideration. All he concludes is, that, however the thing is worked out or explained, he must, somehow, have had an intelligent and righteous source. In this way he gets the conception of some great power from whom he springs and upon whom he is dependent.

This belief of his would, so far, be but an imperfect guide in leading him to a general conclusion. But when he goes further, and applies his faculty of inquiry and observation to the world outside him, he finds himself confronted with facts which expand and strengthen the belief which he derives from his own qualities and his own existence. He

sees that the world is full of marks of active design, which are in daily operation throughout all Nature. And he goes on to draw in his mind the conclusion that this Creation must have had a Creator, and that these marks of design show a Designer. Why this conviction? Why does he conclude that every effect must have had a cause? Because it is the final answer of his consciousness. Upon this all science rests. You must ever, in the end, come to something which is known, but unproveable. True, some friend who is more learned than he is, may seek to stay the scope of his meditations at the outset, by telling him that he is assaying to deal with a matter of which he knows nothing; and not only so, but of which he can know nothing, since he has knowledge of this world only, and has no experience of any other worlds with which he could compare his observations, and then draw his conclusions. Also that if there be, what he calls marks of design in Creation, they by no means prove the ideal Deity which he has in his mind; that they do

not reach to that extent, but only prove something that is much less than he is prepared to believe.

The Common Man is not silenced, nor yet satisfied by these objections. He never claimed that the argument from design proved, in its entirety, the nature of God; and he does not deny that, as far as intellect alone is concerned, he finds himself in regard to some aspects of this subject in the same position as we are in all branches of human thought, scientific or religious, namely, faced in the ultimate analysis by the unknowable. But what he claims is, that when he discovers intelligence, not blind movement, behind the screen of Creation, he lays one part of the foundation, on which afterwards is raised the superstructure of his faith. As we will see later on, the moral sense, and the lesson to be learned from the moral element in humanity, supply another buttress for the foundation of that faith. Other considerations have their weight. The completion of the superstructure is a spiritual affair. Only, in the first instance, he wants to know if there is any-

thing to build upon. His search is for some reasonable basis, upon which to raise the edifice of his faith. And hence at the outset he is impressed by the evident marks of design in the Universe, as they seem to him to show intelligence at the back of Creation. And what specially challenges his attention is, not alone where this world came from, but it is the active, incessant operations of some Causing power, which he sees going on in it every day, now. It is by no means a question only of the inception of matter; it is the continuous series of existences and of manifestations of activity which he sees daily going on before his eyes, impelled by the force of orderly principles, coming from some source. Nowhere is chaos to be found, or the traces of chaos. The analysis of "Cause," into uniform sequence, appears to the Common Man to be rather a postponement of the question, than its solution. Does not, he thinks within himself, such a disposition of designing causes, toiling away to produce their appropriate effects, toiling ceaselessly, silently, admirably, demand for its explana-

tion, intelligence behind it? The Earth, "it neweth every day" under the ever pressing energy of these living forces. And why should he not believe in the agency of that intelligence? In the part of creation of which we have direct knowledge, we are far from having only dead matter and unconscious agencies to deal with. We find it to be permeated with mind and teeming with life. We have not only the ocean and the tempest, the mountain and the flood; this earth has also her long roll of great intellects, from Plato to Kant, from Homer to Tennyson, from Pythagoras to Newton, who have moulded the course of human thought. And we have the spiritual leaders of men, who called away the mind of the race from material things to Heaven. And is contriving mind, and the spirit that is a force over things material, to be found nowhere else in God's creation? And has it never been there in the past? From what we see around us, and what we know of our present state, are we driven to the necessity of imagining the rise of all things to come

about, without mind or purpose, in a manner so foreign to our existing knowledge and our inherent beliefs? Is this, he asks himself, reasonable? No blind impulses trundling things along somehow; this idea seems to him the most unbelievable of all things. Thus he reasons from what he sees and feels about him. And is he not justified in doing so? Is he not justified in reasoning from principles which are at the root of all human knowledge? Is it any answer to remind him that he is finite and that he cannot grasp the Infinite? Because Providence has decreed bounds to human knowledge, is he not to trust his intellect as far as it does lead him, to guide him in the twilight of earthly life?

Objections such as these do not prevent our Common Man from observing the marks of design with which Nature abounds, and drawing from them the conclusion which they naturally suggest to him. The very amplitude of these and their regularity, impair their effect. If there were only a few of them, occurring now and then, they

would excite more attention. It has been truly observed, that if mankind after living a life of darkness, were for the first time to see the sun rise, all would acknowledge a power Divine. But as these wonders surround us on every side, and we run up against them daily in our lives, we come to regard them as matters of course, commonplace affairs, and do not take to heart the lessons which they are ever spelling before our eyes.

For example, consider one of the most familiar facts of everyday life, the generation of the young. First, we find an imperious instinct, traceable to what immediate causes does not matter, implanted in animals, in order to bring about that union of the sexes, which, without such an impelling force, there would be no inducement to. Next we see, as a result of this union, a surprising work of nature is accomplished in the female, by which in due time the new animal is produced. But this alone would not carry out the purpose of continuing life on the globe. For, if all

the product of this union of animals were of the male, or all were of the female sex, then life on the earth would soon be extinct, and so the object of generation be defeated. Or if three-fourths, say, were male, or three-fourths female, difficulty in carrying on life and confusion would follow. Or if, again, the product of the union of animals was an uncertain matter, being sometimes a majority of the one sex, and sometimes of another, regular conditions of life and growth would be defeated. But what do we find to be the fact? We find that about one-half of the particles of life from which the young develop, belong to the male sex, and the other half to the female sex — the small majority of males, about five or six per cent, being apparently provided, owing to some prescience, to make up for the greater wear and tear of male life, in hunting, fighting, and living the outdoor life. Thus the young being born into the world equally male and female, life is enabled to be continuously carried on. How this is brought about we have no idea. All we

know is, that if the unknown causes did not operate unfailingly, and at the right moment, to produce this equal disposition of sex germs, the purpose of maintaining life upon the planet would be soon defeated. What makes the working out of such a purpose the more striking, is that with individual parents, the progeny may be all male or all female, yet on the whole of the births the balance of half and half is maintained.

During the period of gestation, we find that the organs of sight, hearing, digestion of solids and so on, are being gradually formed, without there being any need for them at present, in the womb; but for which, by some pre-arrangement, everything is ready and waiting in the outside world, as soon as it is reached by birth. When the young are produced, the means taken to carry on the purpose of nature are no less striking. The mother—we now speak of the mammalia—is provided with a special means of nourishment from herself, with which to feed her off-

spring, and is impelled by an all powerful instinct to defend them, if need be, at the risk of her own life. As they grow up, she seeks for suitable food for them, and starves herself that they may be fed. In itself, there is no reason for all this self-sacrifice, so far as she is concerned; but without it, Nature's purpose to have life carried on would be defeated. Then the young, who at first cling to the mother instinctively, forget all about her as soon as they are strong enough to look after themselves, and the need for her no longer exists. The mother too, in the lower animals, forgets all about them, and her instincts, still pursuing the purpose of nature, are devoted to a new set of offspring, until they too are launched in life. There is no sense, we say, in a selfish point of view,—the point of view from which natural instincts in life are generally directed,—for all this maternal devotion; but the purposes of the world, and of the Power which directs them, render it necessary that she should sacrifice herself, in order to

prevent the young from perishing after birth. We see this speaking drama of Nature going on so commonly around us that we take little heed of it; but we have, nevertheless, staring us in the face at every stage of it, the disposition of some directing Power.

So, at least, thinks the Common Man. And it does not satisfy his inquiries, to be told that what he observes does not point to an intelligent direction, but only to methods of evolution coming along in some way which no one can comprehend. The methods by which Creation may be controlled are not, as has been said, the important question to him, so long as the directing Intelligence is there. But, that these evidences of design typify merely phases of a progressive development, which arise from the blind working of the destructive powers of Nature in rejecting unfit forms of life, and leaving the field to better and stronger types,—this he does not believe. He can understand progressive development as the means in the hand

that directs the initial principle, but not as the hand itself.

He learns, indeed, that some do hold that it is owing to automatic principles of natural selection, that those types of life are preserved which we see to survive in the animal world, while others, owing to the same cause, die out. So that, in regard to the example we are dealing with, were any type to fail in maintaining the due proportion of male and female, it would naturally soon be elbowed out of existence by those in which the proper balance was maintained. And that thus it comes about, that the rightly constituted types remain in possession of the field, while the defective ones die out. This explanation seems to the Common Man to make as large a demand upon his credulity, as could the most fanciful dogmas of religion. So he still remains impressed by the designing Power which is behind those apparently fortuitous operations of Nature. He cannot believe that they all really come about by the blind working of things. He looks at the result, produced

somehow, that the young are born with the sexes equally divided, and that if they were not so divided, the life of the world could not be carried on. What complex means, what network of agencies the designing Power may employ, does not affect the conclusion, in his mind, that there must be intelligence to be reached in the last resort.

Nor is he silenced by being asked, Does he really believe in a Being up in the sky, directing these daily affairs of life? The methods of manifestation of the ultimate reality which is behind things are, he is aware, not capable of logical analysis and definition by him. He doubts whether, with his present mental machinery, he could comprehend them, even were they to be stated to him. But he not the less strives to learn so much about them as will suffice for his needs in this life, and chiefly whether he can reasonably conclude that there *is* some intelligent Power there,—such a Power as answers to the religious impulses which he finds to be implanted within him.

If our Common Man looks up to the Heavens, he finds there the same proofs of design and of the sustained arrangement of things at work over the whole Universe, only all upon a scale of grandeur which perplexes him. Confining his attention to his own corner of the sky, he finds that the moon is rolling round the earth, and the earth and the other planets round the sun, in obedience to certain laws, to which it seems to him they are subject. If it be a more correct expression to say that those laws are inherent in them, the fact which impresses him remains unaltered. What he is struck by is the manner in which they go through their revolving courses with exactness, or, where slight deviations occur, that provision is made, by whatever influences them, to maintain the proper equilibrium in the long run. If all this constitution of things was not arranged by some Power, there might be at any moment a universal smash up of the solar system, and of other systems which were under its influence. But no, the moon rolls round the earth, not

very far away. On it rolls, round and round. The velocity of its motion produces a centrifugal force, the effect of which is exactly counterbalanced by the "pull" of gravitation which draws it to us; and so this co-operation of forces makes it go steadily on its path round the earth. If at any moment the power of attraction weakened, off into space the moon would dash. If at any moment the centrifugal force failed, down would the moon come crushing upon us, and there would be an end of this world, as we know it. But owing to principles of action which, imposed by some authority, operate in those bodies, any such catastrophe is prevented, and the moon keeps revolving safely round and round the earth, as it seems to us, for ever.

A similar provident arrangement controls the movements of the millions of worlds which fill the immensity of the Heavens. Comets, which Sir Isaac Newton surmised have some special purpose to fulfil with regard to the planets, sometimes visit us from appalling depths of space; but they also

are under strict control, though they describe quite different paths round the sun from those which the planets describe. At times astronomers discover some of these apparent wanderers, hastening towards the sun as if they were going to plunge into it. If they did, the result in certain cases, we are told, would be fatal to life upon our globe and to several other worlds as well. But we find that the stupendous sweep of these bodies is so directed that, while they go very near to the sun, right up to it, and round it, they are still constrained to keep to their orbit, and off they fly again into space, leaving the sun and the planets to go on their appointed way unmolested.

The Universe thus seems to our Common Man, to present to all observing creatures a standing contradiction of that creed, or no creed, which either denies the existence of the ultimate Power or Intelligence which we call Deity, or denies that the Universe is under His control. To account for what we see, we want not only matter, with its force and motion, but some directing Power over

these, in order to produce Creation instead of Chaos. A universal welter would be the result of matter and force without direction.

Our Common Man then, using the mind which Nature has given him, and drawing conclusions from his reflections thus far upon his subject, in the same way as he draws them in other serious affairs of life, finds himself led on to the belief, that at the base of all things there is a supreme Intelligence which maintains the whole.

CHAPTER IV

MIND, INSTINCT, MORAL SENSE, AND CONSCIENCE

But so far, we have dealt only with one part of the Creation which engages the attention of the Common Man, that material part which he apprehends with his senses. He is even more deeply impressed when he contemplates the wonders of Creation within him—the mental powers of man, however they be explained or derived, and especially his spiritual and moral qualities; also the surprising workings of Instinct in all animals. The mind, with its varied powers and infinite capacities, so well adapted to serve man, appears to him to show purpose and design in every phase. It guides us in life, and is bestowed in such power on some men that

they are able to lead and illuminate the whole race. The accumulated results of the teachings of these great minds, ever growing with the centuries, form a standard for all mankind, of knowledge and virtue, which is higher than that which the average man could of himself set up, but of which, nevertheless, he and the whole race has the benefit. Reason appears to be an attribute derived from Divinity itself, enabling man to contemplate the Deity, to speculate upon his own destiny, and also to direct and, if need be, to suppress his animal nature.

And under the head of Mind we would briefly refer to the fact of Instinct. We say briefly, for marvellous as is instinct, and wonderful the lessons which it is daily teaching, the facts are on the surface, ever obtruding themselves on even the casual observer. He who looks may read, and learn, if he will learn. We find that Nature plants in animals who are not guided by reason, and in men before they can reason, and before they are capable of knowing even the meaning of what they do, an imperative impulse

to do the very thing that it is essential for them to do, if they are to live, and the very thing which they would do did they know all the facts, and were they able to reason about them. They act as they would do, if they were directed by an affectionate and far-seeing parent. The sparrow begins fluttering about and collecting, with persistent toil, material for building its nest; then selecting some sheltered spot; then constructing the nest with the skill of a trained artificer; and all this long before she actually wants to lay her eggs. The bee stores up honey during the ample summer for the needs of the starving winter, and packs it away in a hive, which is constructed for securing space on a plan that the mathematician could not improve upon. The beetle prepares for itself a hole in the ground, much larger than its then size requires, so as to be ready for the coming chrysalis stage in its career. The caterpillar constructs the cocoon, in anticipation of its future state as a butterfly. The infant, with its senses still undeveloped, knows how to

turn unerringly to the mother's breast. Some authority takes care to ensure all this provident arrangement for carrying on life and the scheme of Creation. What is it? Whence derived? "Lapsed intelligence"? "The result of profitable variations" to the species? "A propensity prior to experience"? "A little dose of reason"? Well, thinks the Common Man, whichever of these ideas give the true explanation, all that he can certainly see, is the fact of some provident cause, or actuating principle, having implanted in creatures a wise motive power, without which life on the globe could not go on. And, as it is not derived from the intellect, or from any other existing principle in the animal, it seems to be introduced into its life in a direct and peremptory manner, producing the result which is wanted and terminating with the accomplishment of its purpose.

When the Common Man, from looking without looks within, he finds within him the idea of right, justice, virtue, truth, rising to and resting upon the lofty ideal of absolute,

perfect goodness, which lofty ideal is truly only imperfectly apprehended by us; but there it is, still ever there, for men to turn to from the dust and tumult of earthly existence. He cannot help thinking that this sublime instinct in the human race must have its origin in some supreme source, which embodies that perfect ideal of goodness, to which men can only dimly aspire, but which, nevertheless, they cannot help believing to exist.

For what is it that he finds to be a part of himself? A something which is different from his animal nature, the obligation upon him, as if imposed by some superior Power, to do the true and the just thing, and not to do the false and the base thing, and the conviction which possesses him, that this obligation would be as imperative in the fixed stars as it is upon this planet, and as much so a million years hence as it is to-day. When he contemplates such a principle as this, his heart refuses to assign to it an earthly origin.

We are not now discussing the founda-

tion of this belief, in all its aspects. At present we only say, that such is the belief of our Common Man. It is also, it must be added, the belief of some millions of other men, and has been so in the past ages of the world, as well as to-day. And certainly, the fact that such a belief is held by thinking beings, is a striking fact. If, indeed, in the whole Universe, there was only one thinking Self who was possessed by such a faith, he would be an object worthy of the contemplation of gods and men.

Our Common Man seeks to learn what he can about this moral sense in man and its voice Conscience. He can claim, however, but slight acquaintance with the ingenious and varied theories which have engaged the attention of the learned regarding its supposed origin. Whether the germs of the moral sense are to be found in animals, and its source for human beings is to be traced to the wants and lessons of the early tribal times; whether we must look for the agencies which have promoted its growth, in reason, or in utility, or in the mere dread

of its reproaches,—these are questions which the Common Man does not undertake to determine. Nor does it seem to him to be necessary for his present purpose to explore all the knowledge, or the speculations on the subject, any more than if he were called upon to recognise the purpose and the virtue of some medicine and restorer of man's bodily system, designed by a great physician, the saving value of which all men felt, he should decline to do so until he could fully search out the exact scientific nature of its composition, could assign the true value to each of its component parts, and was acquainted with the methods employed by the great physician in the recesses of his laboratory. The practical thing for him to know about the medicine is, its purpose and how far it gives effect to that purpose. He can draw his own conclusions as to there being a physician to whom it owes its composition, and as to his intentions in providing it. So with regard to conscience, what now concerns our inquirer, is not so much the methods by which it has expanded among

men, as what in fact it seems to be, and what part it has actually taken in the making of the human character. Whatever be the sources from which it springs, and by whatsoever means it has been speeded on its growth, he can only conclude that such have been the sources, and such were the methods which the Power to which it owes its origin has assigned to it and to its development; unless, to be sure, these developments have come about by themselves and are fortuitous. The process may be long drawn out, the conducing agencies may be varied; what challenges the attention of the Common Man is the result.

In thinking over this part of his subject, as in other phases of his cogitations, he begins, as we have said, by observing what he finds to be within himself. And he certainly finds within himself a principle which reproaches him, and makes him conscious that he is in the wrong, if, overcome by some sinister influence, he does a thing which his judgment condemns as being a

defiance of the moral sense of right and wrong which he finds to be implanted within him. True, he also feels a sense of self-reproach, in regard to mistakes which he may have made, and even awkward episodes which may have befallen him. Thus, if he makes some blunder in social etiquette which exposes him to ridicule, when next day he regards the incident, he may, if a sensitive man, feel a sense of annoyance. Also, if he had unwittingly done something that was injurious to another, he would regret it. But these feelings are widely different from that which he would experience if he had fallen into some act of moral baseness. Such a bad act our Common Man inherently feels to be in itself disgraceful, and of such a nature that it would distress him to recall in the face of death, or of the serious trials of life. But the other lapses would not so affect him. And the base act, he cannot deny to himself to be base, even though it were to be successful, and whether found out or not.

He is sufficiently informed to know that

under the varying conditions of human life, in different ages and among many races of men, the manifestations of conscience have not always been uniform. But this is found to be owing to the differences caused by surrounding conditions of life, rather than to changes in the moral sense itself. For example, in ancient Sparta, thieving was under certain circumstances enjoined upon the youth; not that theft was in itself reckoned a good thing, but that it was thought desirable to encourage dexterity and services that might be useful to the country. This was a distorted view of the matter truly, but it was not owing to the moral sense about dishonesty being non-existent in Sparta, but owing to its being overborne by the considerations we have alluded to. Testimony is given to the truth of this view, by the notice which this freak of the Spartan lawgiver excited both among the Spartans themselves and also among other peoples of that time. But the full scope of conscience is seen, not so much from the occasionally blurred manifestations

of its power in the early times of mankind, or among savage tribes, as from the standard which it has always held with good men, and what it has developed into for the race generally. We judge of its nature from its general effects, and its continued expansion in human affairs, just as we do other influences which make for the improvement of the human race. As men become more and more enlightened, the power of conscience becomes more fully displayed, and its voice more uniform in its monitions the world over. But all the while, it is only the development of a moral sense which has ever been found at the foundation of the human mind and character, feeble though it be and imperfect in the earlier stages of the education of the human race. It does not resemble Minerva in springing forth into being, completely equipped from the first in its Heavenly armour.

What the Common Man observes about conscience now, is its power over millions of men upon the earth, who regulate their lives more or less according to its pre-

cepts. He finds that those precepts, speaking generally, condemn brutality, perfidy, lying, cowardice, and other forms of vice, and approves honesty, benevolence, courage, and other forms of virtue. That its voice is often disregarded, is true; but that only shows that it is there to be disregarded. People mostly do wrong things, not because they have no conscience, but because they disregard their conscience. When men are challenged about such actions, they do not avow them, they explain them away. Men often defy themselves, as it were, and do themselves wrong, contrary to the plainest admonitions of their own intelligence; but no one doubts that the principle of self-love exists. Evil passions in both cases overpower good instincts, alike when we injure our fellows, and when we sacrifice ourselves.

When the Common Man looks into history, he finds that the reality of conscience and its office to mankind has been recognised on all sides. All the great thinkers of the race, from Confucius down to

Darwin, have studied its nature and observed its effects, and all agree that, whatever its origin, it is a judge or mentor within the breast of man, the significance of which it is impossible to ignore. The fact that mankind have all along acknowledged this moral censor, and have felt its need to guide them, and also to give life a purpose, such a belief in the race is not likely to have been the enduring force which it has proved to be, if there was no reality behind it to justify the authority over men which it claims. It is truly styled by Professor Shairp "the absolute in the soul."

Darwin, who, however, does not take the highest view of it, says: "Of all the differences between man and the lower animals the moral sense, or conscience, is the most important"; and he quotes the words of Kant: "Duty! Wondrous thought, that workest neither by fond insinuation, flattery, nor by any threat, but merely by holding up thy naked law in the soul, and so extorting for thyself always reverence, if not always obedience, before whom all appetites are

dumb, however secretly they rebel,—whence thy original?"

Locke, in his work on *The Human Understanding*, says: "That God has given a rule whereby men should govern themselves, I think there is nobody so brutish as to deny. He has the right to do it and we are His creatures. He has wisdom and goodness to direct our actions to that which is best. This is the only true touchstone of moral rectitude." In another of his writings he declares that the only safety he can find, is in never going against the dictates of his conscience.

Mackintosh, after dealing with the imperious and immutable nature of conscience, goes on to observe:

"Afterwards when the religious principle is evolved, conscience is clothed with the sublime character of representing the divine purity and majesty in the human soul. Its title is not impaired by any number of defeats."

Thus the philosopher. Let us hear some famous theologians.

Dean Swift says that conscience is that knowledge which a man hath within himself of his own thoughts and actions. And because if a man will judge fairly of his own actions, his mind will either approve or condemn him, according as he hath done good or evil, therefore this conscience may be called both an accuser and a judge. Also, he observes, it is a director, or guide.

Butler puts the subject thus: Men have several instincts in common with the lower animals, but rise above them in having the capacity of sitting in judgment upon their own actions, and naturally and unavoidably approving some actions as virtuous, and condemning others as vicious. "That we have this moral approving and disapproving faculty is certain," from the universal experience of mankind, as is testified by the languages of all peoples, and by the various systems of morals which have obtained among them, by the natural sense of mankind, which instinctively regards a wrongful act, as essentially different from accidental harm on the one hand, or a just punishment on the

other. A great part of human language and common behaviour throughout the world is formed upon the supposition of this moral faculty being a fact, whether it be called "conscience" or "moral sense," and whether it be "considered as a sentiment of the understanding, or as a perception of the heart, or, which seems the truth, as including both." Nor, he maintains, is it doubtful what course of action this faculty within us approves and what it disapproves, much as it has been disputed wherein virtue consists. For, speaking generally, it is plainly that "which every man you meet puts on the show of," and which the fundamental laws of communities endeavour to enforce, namely, justice, veracity, and regard to the common good.

And it might be added, which the great prophets and moral leaders of the world, of every age and race, have substantially, and allowing for minor topical differences, agreed upon.

Cardinal Newman declares in his *Grammar of Assent*: "That conscience is the voice of

God has almost grown into a proverb. . . . It is proclaimed in the history and literature of nations, it has supporters in all ages, places, and creeds, forms of social life, professions, and classes. It has held its ground under great intellectual and moral disadvantages, it has recovered its supremacy and ultimately triumphed in the minds who had rebelled against it. Even philosophers, who had been antagonists in other points, agree in recognising the inward voice of that solemn monitor, personal, pre-emptory, unargumentative, irresponsible, minatory, definitive."

Benjamin Jowett, the most educated of thinkers, the translator of Plato, a man who had an intellect which was at once keen and fearless, thus expresses his belief, towards the close of a long life: "God is not other than He is seen to be in this world, if we rightly understand the indications which He gives of Himself. Highest among these indications is the moral law, which exists everywhere and among all men in some degree; and to which there is no limit, nor ever will be, while the world lasts; the least

seed of moral truth possessing an infinite potentiality, and this inspiration for the idea is strengthened and cherished by the efforts of a holy and devoted life, which appears to be the greatest moral power in the world."

If from the philosopher, the theologian, and the scholar we look to the sceptic, we find Voltaire to declare that Nature, "say what we will of her," dictates in all ages to all men "principles of Justice which she hath implanted in our hearts."

Turning from philosophers and theologians, scholars and sceptics, to peoples, we find everywhere and in every age the popular recognition of conscience. We might illustrate its power as a national force, by taking the case of two famous ancient peoples and one modern, none of them remarkable for the depth of their religious feelings, the Greeks, the Romans, and in our own time the Japanese. To the Greeks we naturally turn, when we would learn what men have thought on the problems of life.

In Plato's *Republic* one of the Athenian

citizens, in a conversation upon quite another matter, refers to conscience as a subject with which they were all familiar. He remarks (summarising what he says): "When a man thinks himself near death, he has fears and cares that never entered his mind before, and he begins to reckon up in his mind what wrongs he has done to others, and he is filled with dark forebodings. But he who is conscious of no sin has in age a sweet hope, of which Pindar charmingly says: 'Hope cherishes the soul of him who lives in holiness and righteousness, and is the nurse of his age and the companion of his journey.'"

Aristotle says: "I call that law universal which is conformable merely to dictates of nature; for there does exist naturally an universal sense of right and wrong, which in a certain degree all intuitively divine, even should no intercourse with each other, nor any compact have existed. . . . For by no means is it for this or the next day merely that this maxim is in force, but for ever; nor is there any one who knows when it was first revealed. . . . It is not right here and

wrong there, 'but a principle of law to all, it is extended uninterruptedly throughout the spacious firmament and boundless light.'"

And, as Froude tells us, in the later Greek authors, we find the supremacy of conscience asserted over the worn-out formal beliefs of the age. Among the Romans, Lucretius, though by no means a lofty moralist, bears the same testimony. He says, that though the earthly punishment of crime may be wanting, "Yet the mind conscious of evil deeds, feeling dread in anticipation, applies to itself stings and tortures itself with scourges, nor sees what end there can be of its sufferings, and fears lest they should become heavier at death."

In our own time the Japanese, different as their religious ideas are in many respects from those of the Western nations, distinctly recognise as a people, the authority of conscience. The official "Regulations concerning the elementary School course," of the National system of Education, lay it down that, "The culture of the moral sensibilities should be chiefly attended to

in the education of children." And Art. 2 directs, "Instruction in morals shall be given and the cultivation of the conscience of the children, the fostering of their moral sensibilities, shall be considered the special objects of this instruction."

All the sound literature of the world goes upon the assumption that there is a moral sense in men, and that there is an eternal righteousness presiding over affairs, in the final resort. This is specially to be seen in the poets, who have given voice to the natural feelings of the human race.

In Spenser we read that it is vain to think to restrain a people who have no touch of conscience. Shakespeare makes constant reference, both in grave mood and in gayer tone, to the part which conscience plays in the affairs of life. Such does he consider the sensitiveness of human nature to its warning voice, that he proclaims it to be that which invests death with its terrors. Milton asks:

> On Earth
> Who against faith and conscience can be heard
> Infallible?

Dryden, alluding to the Heathen, says:

> To Nature's plain indictment they shall plead;
> And by their conscience be condemn'd or freed.

Pope, in the Universal Prayer, stamps the dictates of conscience as the true guide of life. Burns, in his "Prayer in the prospect of Death," recalls the failings of his life, which "something loudly in my breast" arraigned him for. Byron, even in his sportive allusions to conscience, recognises at least what men commonly felt in regard to it.

Oliver Goldsmith, whose writings contain admirable illustrations of the homely morality of ordinary life, makes the Vicar of Wakefield exclaim, when urged by his children to submit to the bad squire: "What, my treasures, why will you thus attempt to persuade me to do the thing that is not right! My duty has taught me to forgive him, but my conscience will not permit me to approve. Would you have me applaud to the world what my heart must internally condemn?"

Scott describes the fitful gleams of the moon over "Tees's stream," as resembling

the changes of a guilty dream, disturbed by the stings of conscience. Readers of Browning and Tennyson and later poets of our own time, will recall many passages in which homage is paid to conscience and the moral sense in man. And generally, it may be said that all writers who have influenced mankind, have recognised the sway of the moral faculty over them.

And when we are considering whether the moral sense, as a fact, does exist in mankind, it is not to be overlooked that the popular melodrama always brings retribution to the bad man, amid the general applause of the audience. Though the individual life of each one may be far from perfect, yet the collective sense of the whole applauds the spectacle of virtue struggling to maintain itself against the advances of vice. The payment of "conscience money," years, perhaps, after the default, by those whose act of restitution is known only to themselves, is another instance of the popular belief upon the subject. Even the vicious recognise, and

render homage to, the instinctive belief of mankind in virtue—hence what is called hypocrisy. Colonel Chartres, who was one of the worst of men, used to say that though he would not give a farthing for virtue, he would give ten thousand pounds for a character.

In public affairs the struggle for the rights of conscience has inspired an enthusiasm into citizen soldiers that has enabled them to overthrow disciplined hosts in war. Oliver Cromwell makes frequent reference to conscience in his speeches. In his address on the dissolution of the first Protectorate Parliament in 1655, we find him laying down the principle that men are not to be trampled upon for their consciences—unless, indeed, they only pretend to conscience. And as for himself, he says: "I have thus told you my thoughts, so that my own conscience gives me not the lie to what I say. And then in what I say, I can rejoice." Bismarck considered it to be of the first importance, in his deadly struggle with France, to get the moral sentiment of

Europe against his enemy. Public speakers, who know how to reach the mass of men, appeal to this moral sense in their hearers, with perfect confidence that they are on sure ground. Erskine, the great English advocate, in one of his forensic speeches, says : " It was the first command and counsel to my youth, always to do what my conscience told me to be my duty, and to leave the consequences to God."

Daniel Webster, America's statesman and orator, thus in one of his speeches adjures his countrymen : " With conscience satisfied in the discharge of duty, no consequences can harm you. There is no evil that we cannot either face or fly from, but the consciousness of duty disregarded. A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omniscient like the Deity."

Answering to this moral sense in man, we find that the general order of the world is so constituted, that obeying its instincts leads to highly beneficial results for mankind, in forming types of noble men, also in improving the character of men in general, and so promoting the advancement of the

race even in this world. In those cases, which at times happen, where obedience to the commands of conscience do not conduce to immediate worldly success, its power is often displayed in a striking manner. The moral character of the man is raised by adherence to virtue, whether he be successful or unsuccessful. In the face of earthly rebuffs, the belief of the good man in the still imperious claims of conscience upon him, remains unshaken. This lofty and pathetic assurance of the human heart is, at least, as old as Job. In the midst of his greatest troubles he exclaims: "Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live." And the example of such men sheds abroad light to all mankind, like guiding stars till the day dawns.

On the other hand, much of the success of conscienceless men is only temporary, and their career even in this life often meets with a fitting retribution. Wickedness does not take lasting root. There is something in evil that makes for instability, and out

of its own conditions, induces a day of reckoning.

"It is not possible, Athenians! it is not possible," exclaims Demosthenes, who, as an orator, felt sure of the response of his audience,—"it is not possible to found a lasting power on injustice, perjury, and treachery. These may perhaps succeed for once and borrow for a while from hope a gay and flourishing appearance. But time betrays their weakness, and they fall of themselves to ruin. For as in structures of every kind the lower parts should have the firmest stability, so the grounds and principles of great enterprises should be justice and truth."

Froude truly says of history: "First it is a voice for ever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written upon the tablets of eternity. For every false word or unrighteous deed, for cruelty and oppression, for lust or vanity, the price has to be paid at last: not always by the chief

offenders, but paid by some one. Justice and truth alone endure and live. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes at last to them, in French revolutions and other terrible ways."

This moral sense in man, then, voiced as it is by conscience, seems to the Common Man to perform a Divine purpose, in inspiring the human intellect with the idea of perfect goodness, the source of which he must seek in some sphere above the world. Its authority even now prevails among men, and its empire over all, he feels, must in the end prove indefeasible. Even now, the soul of man experiences for this perfect ideal, the longing of an exile for his home. And, as both this higher scope of conscience, and also its practical usefulness in improving the world, must originate from some cause, it seems to the Common Man a reasonable conclusion that it comes from a Power, under whose direction mankind are being trained continuously, if slowly, to better conditions of existence. In the material world, if we see agencies which

produce some useful result, we infer design; and in the moral world, if we find agencies also leading to good results, we equally infer design there and attribute them to that design. The two conditions of things are reciprocal and fit into one another. If there is a moral sense in men, and if it is found to be adapted to improving their natures and to elevating the life of the world, we should naturally conclude that it was a righteous Ruler by whose dispensation it was imparted to His creatures; and, conversely, if there is such a Ruler over mankind, we should expect Him to impart, by methods of His own, just such a moral sense to man. And further, from the analogy of the progress of the world generally, and the gradual improvement of mankind in it, we should expect the principle of the moral sense to go on improving and developing, like other of the higher tendencies of our nature. That it does this slowly, and not without lapses in progress, is only too clear. But it does improve. The most striking characteristic

about the operations of Providence, is their stupendously gradual nature. Time is certainly not of the essence of the matter in hand, whatever it be. It never seems to enter into the computation.

By the fact then of conscience, and the moral sense in the human race, the Common Man finds himself brought round again to the question of Deity, which his observation of himself and of Nature, at the outset, suggested to him. He finds himself now faced imperiously by the consideration of the real meaning of the phenomena connected with conscience, which he has been contemplating. Whence comes this moral sense, this ideal of what we ought to do, simply because it is right, and this self-reproach if we do wicked things? Why do we feel self-condemned if we do a bad thing, though no one may know of it but ourselves? The offence which we feel we have given, is to some authority beyond us, and which we are conscious is higher than we are. If we conceive of the world as being without a

God, then the claims of conscience would fall very flat. A mere general duty to humanity, to avail in the future, which is unknown to us and in which we would be unknown, with nothing behind it, nothing to back it up, is not enough to satisfy the commanding sense of the obligation to do right, which we feel to be part of our moral nature. Conscience, with no moral authority behind it, could not be understood as a phenomenon of human life. How, then, is it, that we have within us the idea of the absolute right, and the perfect good?—and that this exalted ideal is liable to be offended by the perpetration of moral turpitude? What is its ultimate origin? According to principles which we have already considered, such an effect must spring from some adequate cause. If this is not to be traced to that Power under whose influence the human race arose, where shall we seek for it?

Our Common Man, thus, from these lines of observation and reflection,—the abounding evidences of purpose and arrange-

ment, denoting intelligence behind the screen of Creation; the mind of man, circumscribed though it be, yet so amply fitted to his needs in this life, together with the marvel of Instinct; and the Moral Sense, with its sublime inspirations in the heart of man, demanding some source from on High,—from these lines of thought, our Common Man, we say, is led to believe that there is a God. It is true that he cannot see this divine Entity, or, as a matter of reason, explore and define all His qualities, nor yet grasp Him to his own consciousness by any exercise of mind only; for he is not now contemplating the experiences of religion, which pass the human understanding, and transcend the bounds alike of argument and of evidence. But, in this aspect of the subject, he judges of Him from the manifestation of His presence, external and internal, which he meets. Just as when he speaks to a friend, he has no doubt that the friend is talking to him, but he has no further proof of this than the outward

signs of speech, gesture, and so forth, which assure him that his friend is there. The actual friend himself, the personality which we call "I," he has never seen, nor detected by his senses; he is satisfied of his existence from the outward manifestations of it. In the same way, from the outward manifestations which this frame called "Creation" gives forth, he concludes that there is an Intelligence behind it, animating and directing the whole. The inward inspirations of the moral sense complete his conviction. This conclusion certainly by no means involves or proves all the postulates of what we call "religion"; but it lays the foundation for them. The superstructure, as has been said, is raised partly by deductions which naturally follow from that great fact, and partly by the spiritual instincts which are a portion of the nature of the Common Man.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY

In arriving at the conclusion which we have stated, the Common Man is acting, though he may not know it, in unison with the general belief of the great family of mankind, in all its branches, and in every period of the world's history. This fact, this mere fact, is a weighty one, and the more we think over it the more we shall find to be involved in it. For the belief in a superior Power, in some form behind Creation, which controls man's destiny, has been held by the human race from the beginning. It has also been acknowledged by the greatest intellects, however they may differ in their other speculations, and it has been voiced in every tongue, from

the rude incantation of the savage, to the sublime flights of the prophet, and the inspiring message of the evangelist.

No doubt the ideas which have been held about this superior Power, while at times noble and enlightened, have also been among the mass of men often crude, defective, and doing little credit to either the object of their worship, or to the intelligence of the worshippers. But the point is, that the idea of God, in some form, has always been among the natural beliefs and the inherent aspirations of mankind. Its earliest impressions were, in some peoples, connected with natural phenomena, with the forces of Nature which men instinctively attributed to an unseen Power behind; and their ideas were often confused and imperfect, like most of men's early notions; such as those about astronomy, physics, and science generally. But noble conceptions of Deity were proclaimed from the first by the founders of great religions, though frequently these proved too lofty for the rude and simple peoples to whom

they were given, and were by them afterwards corrupted and mixed with polytheism and superstition. Still, the true conception was there, and as the peoples grew in intelligence, they, or the most thoughtful of them, recurred to the purer principles of the early message. The history of the Jewish people affords a striking example of this chequered course of the worship of God. The theology of the East shows much the same experience, at least so far as decadence from a high ideal to lower levels is concerned.

If we look to the Christian, which is certainly the noblest form of religion among men, we find that it is the creed of the leaders of the human race; and surely when we are appealing to the experience of man as a reasoning and spiritual being, we are entitled to invoke as the voice of the race, the most enlightened and spiritual form which its religious beliefs attain to—what the idea of Deity in human nature as a fact develops into.

But all the great religions of the world

show a general uniformity, in having the belief in God as their foundation principle. The Assyrian, Egyptian, Mahometan, Indian, and Persian, as well, of course, as the Jewish and the Christian, agree in this, though their conceptions about the attributes of Deity may differ. In their origin they all had either the idea of one God only, or of one god who was pre-eminent over all lesser gods. For in many forms of Polytheism, we still find in the last resort the belief in one great Ruler. Professor Maspero tells us that the "Egyptians adored a Being who was unique, perfect, endowed with absolute knowledge and intelligence, and incomprehensible,—the sole generator in Heaven and Earth, who Himself is not generated." And we read that in very early times they believed, "That the all scrutinising eye of the Deity penetrated into the secrets of the heart, and as the rewards of the good were beyond conception, so were the punishments of the bad." In the Egyptian Hymn to Amen Rà, which was written some twelve or thirteen centuries before Christ, amid

much that is wild and wandering, we read this addressed to the Deity: "Only Form that didst make all that is, One and only one Maker of all who have being,—Maker of those who are, Former of those who have been,—Hail Thou who didst make all that is! Lord of Truth, Father of the Gods." The inscriptions in the tombs near Thebes show that the people at their date held the belief in a future state, and a future judgment, and this involves the idea of a Ruler and Judge over all. From the cuneiform writings on the tablets, we learn that the Assyrians prayed to God, centuries before the Christian era. In Central America also, there are found records long anterior to our civilised times, which contain prayers addressed to "The Creator and Maker who seest and hearest us."

In India, Hindooism originally announced some noble conceptions of one great Creator and Ruler of the Universe, such as mark the early stages of several of the religions of the world. But owing to causes which we need not trace, the daily religion of the Hindoos

has now become a thing which is beneath criticism, as a phase of human faith. But that the true idea was there at the beginning, appears from the *Vedas* and the *Vedant*, the sacred books of the Hindoos. In these, which were written probably a thousand years before Christ, God is described as the universal spirit which pervades and diffuses itself through all nature. All beings receive their life from Him. There is only one God, Himself all in all. He sees all beings which fill his immensity—the only principle, the Light of Heaven, the Father of all. He produces everything, He orders and disposes everything; He is the reason, the life and motion of all things. As for the teaching of Buddha himself, it seems, as far as we can grasp its full meaning, to show a marvellously keen insight into the ultimate problem of the Universe and to assume the existence of the Deity, though not to enforce it. Nor can we deny to peoples who hold the Eastern idea of reincarnation, a deep sympathy with the religious principle. For they not only believe in the Great Father

of Spirits, but they hold that the soul of man, after repeated terms of schooling in this life, returns to the bosom of the Divinity.

China and Japan are countries where the religious impulse of humanity is not manifested in such direct belief, as it is in other branches of the human family. But it is a remarkable fact that the ancient religion of China contained the idea of one great and good God, the Ruler of all things, though, certainly, other and lesser Deities were recognised. The truth was there, though error was attached to it. That the worship of this great God has become dissipated, does not destroy the fact, that the idea was there to start with, and there can be little doubt that it still remains in many thinking and religious minds in China. Indeed it seems clear that the reverence paid to ancestors, is mingled with the principle of what we term "religion," and with the idea of Deity itself. It is not something hostile to that idea, or even distinct from it, while it is surely one of the most moving manifestations of the spiritual principle in mankind.

This Monotheism of the early religion of China always was, and still is, recognised by the State. For the past 4000 years the Chinese Emperor, as an official act, offers worship to the Deity on behalf of the people. As for their wise men, they recognise God after a manner of their own, quite opposed to Atheism, though no doubt at times running into Pantheistic shapes. They speak of the "imminence of a holy influence through space." Laotse, the contemporary of Confucius, in his writing entitled *The Book of Reason and Virtue*, gives this explanation of the Deity: "Before Chaos which preceded the creation of Heaven and Earth, there existed one single Being,—immense, silent, and immovable, yet incessantly active; that is the Author of the Universe. I do not know how this Being is named, but I designate it by the word, 'Reason.'—Every created thing emanates from His bosom, and all will return to Him. He has neither form nor substance, nor name. He is the beginning and the end."

The indefiniteness of this teaching has

left its mark upon the following of Confucius. But yet it is the fact, that even among the most confused and defective forms of religion, there has ever been kept alive, in some hearts and minds, nobler and truer conceptions. As to the pure all things are pure, so the spiritual man takes to himself high spiritual conceptions, out of vague philosophies, or even from the idolatry of the crowd. Thus we find that some Eastern philosophers have from Confucianism itself, derived grand ideas of God. One of the prophets of old Japan thus clearly announces a true conception of Deity, derived from the Chinese Classics: "There is a great Lord over all. This Lord is the great and only spirit. He is the Lord and Father of Heaven and Earth, and all things. From the mighty Universe to the tiny mote, from the eternity to moment, there is nothing outside of His glorious regard. His Mystery fills all space,—God of God, Spirit of Spirit." Another Japanese teacher makes this declaration of his faith: "God is not distant: the heart is the house of God." In the same

way we meet in the Greek and Roman authors, lofty descriptions of the Deity, rising high above notions of the popular Polytheism.

In Japan, however, as has been said, the popular spirit of religion finds its expression in deep and feeling expressions of reverence for ancestors, and especially for the ancestors of the Imperial family, and in pilgrimages to the sacred shrine. But it must be observed, that Divinity is ascribed to the Imperial ancestors, and religious sentiments and moral obligations are connected with this form of worship. The natural instinct to seek the superior Power takes a different and a lower form, than that which it does in nations that are higher in the spiritual scale. Professor Nobushige, Professor of Law in the Imperial University of Tokyo, tells us that "Ancestor worship was the primeval religion of Japan from the earliest times of our history, which dates back more than 2500 years, and it is universally practised by the people at the present moment. The worship of the

Imperial Ancestors and especially the first of them, Amaterasu Omi-Kami, or the 'Great Goddess of celestial Light,' may be styled the national worship." This is only another form of the worship of God, however imperfect in its conception. Recent inquiry also points to the conclusion that the stern and intense sense of duty among the Japanese, is founded, as we might expect, upon the belief in a great Ruler of all things.

The religion which Mahomet proclaimed, is intensely believed in by a numerous family of the human race, and his teaching upon this subject is unmistakable. The Koran announces: "Your God is one God; there is no God but He, the most merciful. There is no God but He, the living, the self-subsisting. God is He Who heareth and seeth. God is the Patron of those who believe. God is bounteous and wise. The Lord knoweth what the breast of men conceal." Jelalu-d-Din, a saint and poet of Islam, taught this prayer on his death-bed: "O our Lord God, I breathe but for Thee, and I stretch forth my spirit towards Thee.

—O our Lord God! lay not on me an ailment that may make me forgetful to commemorate Thee, or lessen my yearning towards Thee, or cut off the delight I experience in reciting the litanies of Thy praise. Grant me not a health that may endanger or increase me in presumptuous or thankless insolence. For Thy mercies sake, O Thou most Merciful of the compassionate! Amen."

That the religious principle is alive in Persia is shown by its religious records. This is the impressive prayer of their sacred poet, Sadi, who lived eight centuries ago, and is now recognised as a saint, pilgrims from distant provinces visiting his tomb: "O God have pity on the wicked! As for the good, Thou hast done everything for them in making them good!" And here is another noble prayer of the Persians: "Thou pure and persuading Spirit! Manifest Thyself in me as light when I think, as mercy when I act, and when I speak as truth, always truth!"

If we go lower down in the human family,

we find still the belief in God. James Freeman Clarke in his *Ten Great Religions* says: "The excellent missionary Oldendorp, who took great pains to be accurately acquainted with the Negroes of Africa, assures me that he recognised among them an universal belief in the existence of a God, who made the world. He says: 'Among the black nations with whom I have become acquainted, even the most ignorant, there is not one who does not believe in a God, give Him a name and regard Him as the Maker of the world. Besides this supreme beneficient Deity, whom all worship, they believe in many inferior Gods. They pray to the good Gods only.' The daily prayer of a Wat Ja Negress was, 'O God I know Thee not, but Thou knowest me—I need Thy help!'"

If we look to the Greeks and Romans, we find that they had noble conceptions of God, the source of good and the Ruler of all things; but the popular expression of the religious sentiment was low and defective. They weakened the idea of Deity by their

numerous gods and goddesses, which were only partially believed in, even by the vulgar. Though even among them, to deny that there were gods was a serious matter. More than once public justice was invoked against those who so offended against the popular sentiment. But their philosophers appear to have regarded the idea of these lesser Deities as pointing merely to different manifestations, or aspects, of the central Deity; and they have left us valuable contributions to the conceptions of mankind about the universal Lord of all. In the most remarkable development of the religious idea in Greek thought, known as the Orphic phase, the central principle was that the soul of man was derived from a heavenly source, while the body was of the earth, earthy. And hence came among some of the most intellectual of the Greeks, the belief in the immortality of the soul, which involves the existence of Deity, when the body was claimed by "Death, the all-conquering." In the Dialogues of Plato we find the noblest expression possible of this,

which has been the central hope of mankind, the anchor of the human soul, through all the perplexities which surround life.

The views that Socrates announced, as they are interpreted to us by Plato, are among the most remarkable. Some, indeed, have thought that Socrates was condemned to death by the Athenians, because he maintained the unity of the Deity, against the Polytheism of his time. But though facts do not bear out this view, yet when we read his words, we feel that no one could have spoken as he did, unless he had some inspiration as to the truth about the Father of all Spirits.

In the *Phaedo*, just before his death, he thus discusses the question of a future life: "But then, O my friends, if the soul is really immortal what care should be taken of her, not only in respect of that portion of time which is called life, but of eternity! And the danger of neglecting her from this point of view does indeed appear to be awful. If death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have a good bargain

in dying; for they would have been happily quit, not only of their bodies, but of their own evil with their souls. But now as it appears plainly to be immortal, there is no release or salvation from evil, except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom."

In later Greece we find the philosophical Plutarch, in his Essays, proclaiming the existence of the supreme Being, the moral Ruler of the Universe, and discussing the reasons for believing in a future state in an enlightened manner. He thus answers the objection of those who argued that there could not be other worlds than our own, since they would require other gods to govern them. He says: "Is not one Excellent Being endued with reason and intelligence, such as He whom we acknowledge to be the Father and Lord of all things, sufficient to direct and rule those worlds? If there were more supreme agents, their decrees would be vain and contradictory to each other."

Epictetus, among the Latins, well describes man's duty to God. He exhorts men thus:

"If a man should be able to assent to this doctrine, as he ought, that we are all sprung from God in an especial manner, I suppose he would never have an ignoble or mean thought about himself. For yourself, from your thoughts, cast away sadness, fear, desire, envy, malevolence, avarice, effeminacy, intemperance. But it is not possible to eject these things otherwise than by looking to God only, by fixing your affections on Him only, by being consecrated to His commands. But if you choose anything else, you will with sighs and groans be compelled to follow what is stronger than yourself, always seeking tranquillity and never able to find it; for you seek your tranquillity there where it is not, and you neglect to seek it where it is."

When we turn from those races which we call Heathen, to the Jewish and the Christian Faiths, we find ourselves faced by the most emphatic, and at the same time the most enlightened declarations of the belief of man in God. We find men living their lives under the absolute conviction

that there was a God, and a God who heard their prayers, and with Whom they could hold spiritual communion, and in which communion He made Himself known to them. With the explanation of the early Polytheism of the Jews, and of its surprising development into a racial conviction of the truth of the sublime message, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God," the Common Man is not concerned. He judges by the completed revelation as the Jews prized it, and the truths embodied in their Hebrew Scriptures; in the light of which, the personality of the Deity is neither weakened by Pantheistic tendencies, nor dwarfed by the least drift towards Polytheism. However we may explain it, the Jews certainly developed into the "chosen race," for expressing faith in God in the highest form that had yet been given to mankind. The difference between the utterances of the great Jews, with the message of Christianity widening and casting light upon the earlier dispensation, and the other leading Faiths of the world, is instructive,

as showing the high range which the religious principle can attain to in human nature. Those two religions show what men are capable of reaching in the spiritual direction. The other faiths often proclaim noble principles; there is, indeed, something divine in every religion. But they want the inspiring insight of the Jewish message and the Christian gospel. It is the difference between the statue developed by the cunning hand of the artist, and the animating presence of the living, breathing man himself. And we are entitled to take the faith in God which they proclaimed, as a part of the heritage of the race. It shows what man is capable of, when he does aspire in his search after God.

And when we contemplate the religious literature of the Jewish people, we must not forget their history. They have survived a succession of great Empires, to whose material strength they could offer no resistance, who triumphed over them and strove to extirpate their race — the Assyrian, the Egyptian, the Roman, the

Turkish. In later ages, too, they have been often persecuted and driven from country to country. The Romans not only trampled upon them, but intellectually regarded them as common subjects of ridicule, as a by-word for all that was absurd and incredible. Yet now the Roman Empire is extinct, while the Jews are flourishing all over the civilised world. They make the power of their people felt everywhere, and in some lands rise to the highest positions; but, all the while, they keep themselves a separate and a peculiar people, worshipping the God of Israel in just the same fashion, so far as principles and belief go, as did their remote ancestors 4000 years ago. Their race appears everywhere, vigorously moving along with the tide of human life, but such is the force of their ancient belief, that they nowhere mingle their race or its faith, in the tide of the nationalities which surround them. And to-day, if you go into the home of the faithful Jew, whether in Europe, or in Asia, the backwoods of America, the veldt of South Africa, or the Bush of Australia,

you will find that he diligently teaches his children the old Hebrew tongue, the language of his Prophets, so that they may read and learn, in words hallowed to them by the inspiration of ages, such passages as these:

SOLOMON'S PRAYER ON THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

(About 1000 B.C.)

Then Solomon said: The Lord hath said that he would dwell in thick darkness. But I have built a house of habitation for Thee . . . a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. . . . But will God indeed dwell upon the Earth? Behold the Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain Thee,—how much less the House which I have builded? Yet have thou respect to the prayer of Thy servant, O Lord, my God! They Thine eyes may be open towards this House night and day. What prayer soever be made by any man, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart. Then hear Thou in Heaven Thy dwelling-place and forgive.

(Observe the peculiar force which belongs to these words, from the fact that they ran counter to pride and enthusiasm felt both by himself and by the people who crowded around him, for the grand Temple which, with so much sacrifice and labour, they had

erected. He begins to speak about its glories and the greatness of their undertaking, now at last successfully completed, and then, as if struck and overpowered by the sense of the majesty of the true God, exclaims, "But will God indeed dwell upon the earth?" etc. etc.)

Or take these from the Psalms:

> The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. For as the Heaven is high above the Earth, so great is His mercy towards them that fear Him. Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.
>
> As the Hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? Why art thou cast down O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.

Three thousand years have passed since these aspirations were breathed out from the soul of man. Since that time not only have nations lived and died, and civilisations risen and decayed, but the tone and methods of human thought have changed, as can be

seen by the reasonings which are preserved for us in the Dialogues of Plato, compared with the intellectual methods of our own time. Yet the spiritual outpourings of the old Hebrew express exactly the feelings of the religious heart to-day. And why? The reason is because they give voice to what is part of man's nature. Intellectual methods change, but the heart of man remains the same.

When we come to Christianity we find, putting aside for our present purpose the question of direct inspiration, a transcendent manifestation of the religious side of man's nature. The words of Christ and His life are without parallel in their revelation of the Divine element in man. As Goethe says: "Let mental culture go on advancing, let science go on gaining in depth and strength, and the human intellect expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity, as it shines in the Gospels."

We certainly cannot claim Jean Jacques Rousseau as a moral teacher, but yet even

his testimony to Christianity may be given. "What prejudices, what blindness," he exclaims, "a man must have when he dares to compare the son of Sophroniscus (Socrates) with the son of Mary. The death of Socrates philosophizing tranquilly with his friends is the most gentle that a man could desire; that of Jesus expiring in torments, insulted, jeered, cursed by a whole people, is the most horrible that a man could dread. Socrates taking the poisoned cup blesses him who presents it, and the man weeps! Jesus in his horrible punishment prays for His savage executioners. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God."

And what is the Christian revelation about Deity? Christ proclaims to the whole family of the human kind, of whatever race (black or white), condition, clime, or civilisation, that God is their Father, hearing their prayers, compassionating their sorrows, knowing their hearts, calling on them to cast their cares upon Him. This trans-

cendent declaration was first made to a few peasants, ignorant men. They and their followers are described by both their foes and their friends, as belonging to the lowest class in the social scale. Caecilius says to them: "The greater part of you are men collected from the lowest dregs of the people, ignorant, credulous women,—unpolished boors, illiterate, ignorant, they do not understand civil matters, how can they understand divine?—They have left their tongs, mallets and anvils to preach about the things of Heaven." The Christian Fathers give much the same account of their proselytes. St. Jerome says: "They are gathered not from the Academy, or the Lyceum, but from the low populace." According to Theodoret, "they are white-smiths, servants, farm-labourers, woodmen, men of sordid trades, beggars." Against these beggars, and the message of Christ, there was marshalled the whole power of the existing civilisation, its intellectual force as well as the incubus of its luxury and its vices, and

the authority of its government. Not unnaturally so, indeed, since that message proclaimed nothing less than destruction of that system of civilisation. It had nothing human to aid it, except the response which it met with in the heart of man. And does it not throw a striking light upon the religious element in man's nature, when we find that this noble appeal to its loftiest impulses, was caught up and responded to by mankind as just what was wanted to satisfy them?

True, its growth was slow. It had not the whirlwind success of a creed imposed upon men by a conquering hero. Its advance was owing to the complete way in which it met the wants of the human heart; the heart responding to its influence much as a well and truly adjusted receiver in wireless telegraphy, catches up the throb from the aether which is designed for it. And presently it lights up the world with a living faith in God, which men realise so vividly, that they glory in dying for it. Let us take this declaration of Deity made, in early

times, on behalf of Christianity: "I declare unto you God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, dwelleth not in Temples made with hands. He giveth all life and breath and all things. And hath made of one blood all nations of men! that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being."

The spokesman of this faith, when some years later he suffered martyrdom for it, thus affirmed his own personal confidence in it, when in the face of impending death. "I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

This vivid belief in the unseen, in what cannot be grasped by the senses, is the greatest fact in the spiritual history of

mankind. No doubt the fact that men have believed in certain things, does not prove that those things existed, exactly as they imagined them. But it seems to the Common Man, that a belief which mankind has agreed in holding in all ages of the world, and among all peoples, the most learned and intelligent included, and which has produced such practical results among men, cannot be a mere figment of the imagination—cannot be a mere fancy come some way among men, only to mislead them. History teaches that no general impulse of man's nature and no general, abiding conclusion of the human mind, is without some basis to justify it.

CHAPTER VI

PHILOSOPHY

If we now look from the spiritual side of man's nature to his intellect, and ask what the thinkers of the race have said upon this subject, we find the great majority of them to have agreed in the belief that there is a God who controls the Universe, and, generally, in the conclusions which naturally follow from this belief. The voice of some of these leaders of men, in different nations, has already been referred to, when dealing with the evidence of the religious instinct in man. The conclusions of some of the other intellects, which have left their impress upon mankind, may be added.

Many of the early philosophers of Greece proclaim one God.

Aristotle cannot be said to have thrown much light on the nature of the Deity, though he described Him as, "Eternal, perfect; indivisible, perfect, without parts, devoid of passions and unchanging." But Plato taught that all Creation was under the government of the one great, all-wise God. He, however, seems to have been oppressed, and not unnaturally so, by the difficulty of conceiving the act of the creation of matter at all, and of the Divine power over it; though some later philosophers of Greece disowned this, as an imputation on the school of Plato. It is, however, noticeable that the Jewish account of creation, represents the world as being constituted out of pre-existing materials. And the truth is, that while the act of creation is inconceivable to us, we are at the same time faced on all sides by undoubted facts which science reveals, but the real nature of which we can form no conception of, any more than we can of the act of creation. And Plato speaks of God as the "Maker and Father of the Universe"; while he is indignant with those

who say that the superior Power, or Powers, have no interest in the affairs of the world. And of many of the speculations of Plato about the Soul, and the spiritual manifestations and the progress of which it is capable, it is no exaggeration to say, that they are sublime, and that they can claim place among the Divine inspirations which have been given to man.

Pythagoras, who lived 2600 years ago, tells us: "There is only one God, who being Himself all in all, sees all the beings who fill His immensity. The only principle, the Light of Heaven, the Father of all. He produces everything, He orders and disposes everything."

Much the same conclusion is arrived at by the wise men of Arabia, by the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and by most masters of modern thought. Descartes, Bacon, Leibnitz, Kant, Locke, Hegel, Herder, Schelling, and Spinoza, all bear testimony to their belief in the existence of a God; though the difficulty which the subject presents, in a metaphysical point of

view, to a logical analysis and a complete definition, is shown by the varying views which, at different periods of his life, one of those eminent thinkers held. Spinoza, we read, at one time maintained the idea, simply, of one God; while at another, he, as far as can be understood, weakened this into almost a form of Pantheism. Bacon's straightforward judgment is: "I had rather believe all the fables in the Legend and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame was without a Mind. And therefore God never wrought a miracle to convince Atheism, because His ordinary works convince it. It is true that a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth the men's minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity." Descartes says: "With respect to God were I not occupied by

prejudices, and my thought beset on all sides by the continual presence of the images of sensible objects, I should know nothing sooner nor more easily than the fact of God's existence. For is there any truth more clear than the existence of a Supreme Being, or of a God, seeing that it is to His essence alone that existence necessarily and eternally pertains?—Without the knowledge of God, it would be impossible to ever know anything else." Locke puts it this way: "From the consideration of ourselves, and what we infallibly find in our own constitutions, our reason leads us to the knowledge of this certain and evident truth, that there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing being: which whether any one will please to call God, it matters not. The thing is evident, and from this idea duly considered, will easily be deduced all those other attributes, which we ought to ascribe to this eternal being. If, nevertheless, any one should be found so senselessly arrogant as to suppose man alone knowing and wise, but yet the product of mere ignorance and

chance, and that all the rest of the Universe acted only by that blind haphazard, I shall leave him to that very rational and emphatic rebuke of Tully, to be considered at his leisure. What can be more sillily arrogant and misbecoming, than for a man to think that he has a mind and understanding in him, but yet in all the Universe beside there is no such thing? Or that those things which, with the utmost stretch of his reason, he can scarce comprehend, should be moved and managed without any reason at all? From what has been said it is plain to me, we have a more certain knowledge of a God, than of anything our senses have not immediately discovered to us. Nay, I presume I may say, that we more certainly know that there is a God, than that there is anything else without us. When I say we know, I mean there is such a knowledge within our reach which we cannot miss, if we will but apply our minds to that as we do to several other inquiries."

To the astronomers it may be said that "The Heavens are telling." Kepler de-

clares: "My greatest desire is that I may perceive the God whom I find everywhere in the eternal world, in like manner also within and inside myself." And Newton, turning from his transcendent investigations into the motive power of the Universe, to the consideration of the First Cause, exclaims: "God we know by His qualities and attributes and by His most wise and excellent structure, and by final causes."

Following on this, we read of the conclusion of Richard Owen, the naturalist. "He closed his discourse by saying that he was brought to the same conclusion as that which Newton himself arrived at, that there is a First Cause, which he was convinced was not mechanical." And Darwin says: "Authors of the highest eminence seem to be fully satisfied with the view that each species has been specially created. To my mind it accords better with what we know of the laws impressed upon matter by the Creator, that the production and extinction of the past and present inhabitants of the world should have been due to secondary causes,

like those determining the birth and the death of the individual. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that while this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved."

Turning to the class of practical men, men of "affairs," we find that Bolingbroke, though a Freethinker, maintained that there "lives and works, self-existent and indivisible, one Almighty God; that the world is His creation," and that we can discern from this creation, infinite wisdom coinciding with infinite benevolence, operating not by particular, but by general laws; and that we can also discern a fundamental connection between the idea of God and the reason of man,—the basis of morality. Bismarck said that the State must rest on a religious basis. When some one praised the power of "genius" in his presence, he

affirmed that the sense of "duty" stood higher, and by duty he meant what Kant defines as the Categorical Imperative, which, we take it, necessarily argues Deity in the background. Burke, who has been styled the greatest philosopher in practice whom the world has ever seen, gives his verdict thus: "We know that man is by his constitution a religious animal, and that Atheism is against not only our reason, but our instincts, and that it cannot prevail long." So true is it, as had been remarked by Freeman Clarke, that the belief in God has been held by "all the great masters of philosophic thought. However they may differ upon other questions, they all with one consent agree in this sublime faith. The consent of thought in this belief is most extraordinary."

Even where no distinct belief is to be found, as in the Demonology of past times and in the modern developments of Spiritualism, we still see evidence of this instinct of our nature; only that it finds its expression in abnormal manifestations, instead of in direct

religious faith. Idolatry itself is a witness, though a stupid witness, in favour of the belief in a real Deity. In these cases the religious feeling is side-tracked from the main line, but is still in communication with it. Some have urged that the variety of religions is an argument against the truth of any of them. But as the vast majority of them, however antagonistic to one another, agree in declaring that there is a God, their united testimony upon this point is only made stronger by their antagonism in other matters. All human powers are weak,—man's mental machinery, as well as his spiritual insight; so we must be content if we find a residuum of truth, as the result of the many sided struggles of our race after light—more light.

Our Common Man then, looking back into history and looking around him now in this twentieth century, finds that there is an aptness in the human mind, come from some source, to believe in a God; and also a general agreement among the leading intellects of mankind, that He does in fact

exist. From this has followed an equally general impulse, by which a large proportion of the race are led to seek after God, and to address prayers to Him. Those prayers often do not seem to be directly answered; but on men pray. And whence comes this instinct of prayer? Various explanations, more or less correct, may be given of its earlier manifestations among men; but whence its primal source? Whence this impulse of man to pour out his soul to the vault of Heaven, silent though it be? How is it that ages ago, even in the infancy of the world, in wild uncultured times, one of us men is found to exclaim in the earnestness of his soul, "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God"? An instinctive belief is never implanted in us in vain. A philosopher has indeed questioned this, and has illustrated his objection, by saying that because we have a desire for food, it does not follow that we are able to get it. But the point is, that when Nature implanted the desire for food, it was her purpose and arrangement that it should be satisfied, and,

as a fact, this purpose is generally fulfilled. It is part of her plan that animals should not only desire food, but that they should get it. Yes, the abiding instincts of man's nature have always some objective purpose. We find that our other instincts are directed to further some useful result. Is this one alone to be found futile and misleading?

Philosophers have in different ages debated the question of the plurality of worlds, and upon this, as on all other questions, have framed different theories. To the Common Man it seems reasonable, judging by such intellectual lights as have been vouchsafed to us here, to conclude, as he looks out on the Heavens, that such of those shining orbs as are suited to sustain life, teem with life of some sort. Why not? The experience of this world teaches us that life may exist under the most various and discordant conditions — as widely different as that of the mite in the cheese, and the eagle soaring over the Andes; or a Newton solving the problems of the Universe, and an oyster resting in his shell.

Is it reasonable to suppose that men are the only forms of intelligence, above the other animals, in God's Creation; that there is nothing between Infinite perfection and poor man? Science teaches us that many of the conditions of our globe are to be found substantially reproduced in the million worlds of space; such as what we call matter, its power of attraction, electricity, heat, cold, colour. The light which comes to us from some star in the deepest abyss of space, is amenable to the same analysis, and reveals the same qualities as the light which we get from a gas jet in our house. In those heavenly bodies which we can see closer, we find evidence of land and water, mountain and valley, atmosphere, ice, and snow, much the same as on our own globe. In Mars we have clear proof of vegetation, and of prolonged parallel lines due to some influence, to which it is hard to assign any other than an artificial origin. Some of those other worlds appear to be dead, others to be only in the process of formation; but millions of them must be in the stage of

middle life, so to speak, for we can see them before our eyes in the stages of gradual condensation, from the gaseous state to the solid, just such as our own world has passed through. It would certainly be strange if they were all empty, silent, lifeless, while this planet of ours is full of life, and everything is so obviously constituted to maintain life—the grass of the field, the leaves of the tree, the fountain bubbling with sustaining water. We could not conceive of it as being other than what it is, a world resounding on all sides with the hum of existence. It may be, of course, that all other worlds are dead. Anything is possible. To be sure we have no absolute knowledge about it. We can only reason from such knowledge as we have, and be guided by such intellectual forces as control our minds. But reasoning from all that we know, or think here, we find it hard to believe that such an inconceivable caprice marks the usually uniform operations of God's Creation, and that while this little grain of the Universe, called the Earth, is ever persistently bursting into life, all the

rest of the immensity of matter is sterile, dead; a vast, eternal grave of Nature and all her works.

But if there is life and with it intelligence throughout the Universe, is it not likely that there is, with intelligence, the same impulse which we find to be in us men, to seek out the source of that intelligence? Are the spiritual powers and aspirations which we find to be so marked in this world, confined to earth alone? Are all those peopled worlds crowded only with animal life, and left destitute of those higher principles which have so much assisted to develop the human race, and without which, indeed, the race could not have been developed at all, but must have remained in the same condition as the beasts of the field? But if that is not so, if they too are susceptible to influences from Heaven, if Beings in them also look upwards to their Maker, if from the stupendous circumference of Creation there is ever breathing forth to its Source the universal prayer, what are we to think if, in truth, it is all mere futile chatter,

sounded out in vain to dumb unheeding space?

Or let us consider the moral sense, the power of conscience, which has played such a large part upon this earth. Is it reasonable to believe that it is to be found in this world of ours only, among all the worlds which throng the Heavens? Here with us, we feel from its very nature, that its potency and scope cannot be bounded by this earth, or by any particular region of the Heavens. We cannot conceive it altering when you pass a certain line in the sky, and being something different on the other side of that line. Millions of men are possessed by the instinctive belief, not only that mercy, truth, devotion to the good, self-sacrifice, are inherently noble things, but that from their very nature they must remain so, to all eternity, through all space, and under whatever changes the personality of man may undergo in the future. They could not believe that cruelty, perfidy, blasphemy, would be good things if displayed upon a star plunged away in the depths of space, or

ages hence, any more than to-day. But if this moral sense extends to the Beings on other worlds, are we to say that they are all equally misled, all deriving their moral strength from a delusion and a mockery? Is the Universe peopled by such befooled intelligences? The heart of man refuses to believe it.

CHAPTER VII

BELIEF

Our Common Man then has got thus far, drawing conclusions by means of such mental powers and such natural insight as are allotted to man, that he sees good reason to believe that there is a God. Spiritually, he finds within him a need for some such source to aspire to. It is quite true that while he grasps this central fact, he could not as an intellectual process define and prove all that is involved in the nature of the Deity. As far as his intellect goes, all he holds to is, that there is a conscious Power, an infinite and independent Essence, over all things. The idea is surrounded to his small faculties with much that passes his comprehension, and by much that is quite

inexplicable to him. But this, as he often calls to mind in his inquiry, is only what his state is in regard to many other problems by which he is faced, both in mental and physical matters. Whichever way we may look, we find ourselves in the presence of facts which are incomprehensible to us, but which, nevertheless, we believe to exist. The greatest thinkers, to whom we Common Men are mere children, after lives spent in inquiry, have to confess that with them, as with us, knowledge begins and ends in wonder.

Isaac Newton and David Hume may be justly taken as two of the finest intellects, each in their own line, ever given to mankind. And what does Hume say of Newton? "While Newton seemed to draw off the veil from some of the mysteries of nature, he showed, at the same time, the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy, and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity, in which they ever did, and ever will remain."

And, as well as we can see, our incapacity

arises, not so much from any inherent difficulty, in the subjects themselves, as from the fact that we have not the mental machinery for grasping them. We see on one side of a thing, but we do not see through it, or all round it. We can conceive all being clear enough to beings of a higher type than we are. We need not doubt that there is a complete explanation of what to us are mysteries, if only we were able to do two things: one to get the right explanation, and next to comprehend it. It seems, therefore, to the Common Man foolish to reject conclusions which he has reasonable grounds for accepting, and to decline to go as far as they do lead him, only because they do not lead him to an absolute explanation, and a complete comprehension of the whole of the problem which is involved. Providence allows us as much knowledge of God and the unseen world as is adapted to our lives here, and our work in this present state of being. A full and direct knowledge would render us unfit for that work.

In our own part of Creation, in this world

of ours, we see that there are various orders of creatures, with widely different mental powers, so that matters which would be quite inexplicable to some classes of them, are readily understood by others. You go into a dark room followed by your faithful and intelligent dog, and, striking a match, the gas blazes forth and the whole place is in an instant flooded with light. Your intelligent dog does not comprehend the many causes which go to produce this result. But you know all about the coal raised from the bowels of the earth, the ingenious processes of the gas-works, the pipes skilfully laid to your house, and directed by clever stops and taps, by all which this wonderful gas (for it, too, is wonderful) is submitted absolutely to your discretion, so that at any moment you have only to will, "Let there be light" and there is light. We have called your dog an intelligent dog, but he would not be an intelligent dog, if, when the light burst upon him, he concluded that the cause of the light was not understood by you, and could not be explained at all, because it was

inexplicable to him. If he was sufficiently intelligent to think about the matter, and if he had the confidence in, and reverence for, his master that it is natural for men to have for some Power superior to them, he would probably be satisfied that though he could not comprehend it, you had power over the whole thing. Even thus does our Common Man feel about his belief in God, and the mystery of His government of this world.

Nor let any one look down upon our Common Man for thus holding to his faith, though he cannot fully comprehend the object upon which it centres. He is as much entitled to his belief in God under such circumstances, as scientific men are entitled to say that they believe in many of their most assured conclusions. For example: the student of astronomy learns that light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles a second; some say even a little more. This fact, to begin with, wants thinking over, in order to be realised by mankind, in comparison with our human methods of locomotion. It takes us, with what we consider

fast travelling, some six weeks to go round the world. But a ray of light would complete that journey nearly eight times over in one second. Yet so far removed are many of the fixed stars from us, that, we learn, it would require thousands of years for the light travelling from them, at that rate, to reach this earth. Our student observes the star Arcturus. It, he is taught, is as large as thirteen hundred of our suns rolled together, and it is flying through space at the rate of 257 miles each second; some say 300 miles a second. A rifle bullet moving at less than half a mile a second, and striking a steel target becomes very hot. At only a dozen times this speed, it would develop heat enough to melt itself. Arcturus is moving at least five hundred times as fast as the rifle bullet. At 300 miles a second, a body several miles in diameter flashing across the line of sight, a few feet before the eyes, would move so quickly that it would not be perceived. Now this Arcturus has been observed by astronomers, and its place fixed, for more than three thousand

years. Yet such is its distance from us, that all the while it appears to us to be standing still, fixed on the same spot, as when our predecessors on earth marked it three thousand years ago, and long before Job gazed upon it, musing on the unanswerable question: "I will demand of Thee and answer Thou me; Canst Thou guide Arcturus, with his sons?" A new star bursts upon the view of the observer, in Perseus. Astronomers tell him that the light from it takes, certainly not less than two thousand years to reach his eye, and probably four thousand, or even six thousand years; so that the outburst which he had witnessed, really occurred at least two thousand years ago, and if the new star were to be obliterated as suddenly as it was created, it would appear to be there for the two thousand years that the last rays of light would take, after leaving it, on their journey to the earth. Also the student learns that some of the fainter nebulæ are buried away in such appalling depths of space, that it is estimated that light coming from them would take two millions of years, flashing

on at its incredible speed, before it would reach our globe. Well, the student accepts all this, and he has good reason for doing so. But when he says that he believes it, what exact state of mind does he declare?

If, instead of looking upwards, we look downwards in Creation, we are equally astounded. What we call matter, the block of wood, the piece of glass, the street gas-light, consist, it seems, of an inconceivable number of Atoms, and these again are composed of a conglomeration of rotating Electrons, all vibrating round a mean position, so that each Atom is like this Universe of ours, with its minute revolving stars, Electrons, —only all so small, so very small! They are as far outside the search of the strongest microscope, as the most distant stars are beyond the sweep of the most powerful telescope. How inconceivable! The particles in a clod of earth whirling round their centres, like, even like, as the Planets soar through space round the Sun!

Or let us look at another branch of Science, electricity. I open books of un-

doubted authority, and I learn that the electric oscillations of open induction-coils have a period of vibration which is measured by ten-thousandths of a second, while the vibrations in the oscillatory discharges of Leyden jars, such as were observed by Feddersen, follow each other about a hundred times as rapidly. The oscillations here dealt with, one learns, are about a hundred times as rapid as those observed by Feddersen. Their period of oscillation, estimated it is true only by the aid of theory, is of the order of a hundred-millionth of a second.

If we turn to the discoveries of Hertz we read in scientific accounts of them, this among other wonders:

> Under these conditions electric waves of ten metres long (longer ones can scarcely be observed in an enclosed space) must complete thirty million oscillations per second. In order to generate waves of three metres long, capable of being observed in a physical laboratory, the generating impacts should follow each other a hundred million times in one second.

This is all very well. Science, I know, is

science. But, O Man of Science,—hundred million times in one second! Yet, I believe this and I have good reason to believe this. But do either you or I comprehend this? No; we assent intellectually, for adequate reasons, to a conclusion which personally we cannot fully grasp, nor realise to our consciousness. In the same way, all through Nature we are faced by and have to accept the incomprehensible and the appalling. The imagination sinks under the effort to grasp many of the fundamental postulates of every science. Our mental machinery is not equal to the task, but in the effort falls in upon itself, like the arm of a child trying to push back a weight beyond its strength.

In truth, the word "believe" is used to express states of mind that are similar in character, but not the same in fact. Our student of astronomy seeks relief, we will suppose, from his severe studies by reading about Egypt and its Pyramids, and conversing with friends who have made the holiday trip there. Were he to make the

statement that he believes that there are Pyramids in Egypt, he would express a different state of mind from that which he would describe, when he says that he believes that the light takes thousands, or millions of years, to come from the distant nebulæ. He may be said to know about the Pyramids, while he concludes about the nebulæ. There is an element of faith and imagination in the one state of mind, which there is not in the other. His belief in the distance of the nebulæ is an act of assent, upon valid reasoning, rather than a fact which his intellect takes to itself as being within its grasp. But it is sufficient for his purpose. It assists our student to prosecute his inquiries into astronomy, which he continues to do, so long as he gets satisfactory grounds upon which to base his belief, and to raise the superstructure of his science.

In the same way, our Common Man's belief in God rests upon sufficient grounds; though he is not granted in this inquiry any more than in regard to other problems in

Nature, absolute knowledge, or clear light, right on to the end of the road which he has to travel. But his conclusions, from reasoning, about the Deity give him sufficient certainty to guide him in this life, and so serve his practical needs as man, the religious animal on earth. He is reasonably led up to a conclusion which, as to its full comprehension, is beyond his reason. And there is no doubt, that millions of the human race who accept this leading, do afterwards attain an absolute conviction of the truth it points to, and an assurance, not only that God exists, but that they personally feel His presence, in accordance with the ancient declaration, that the secret of Deity is with those who reverence the Deity. This feeling, certainly, is no proof to those who do not experience it. Still, it is a factor in the problem to be solved; and with those who can lay claim to it, it fits in with and becomes the complement to, the logical belief upon which the foundation of their religion rests.

CHAPTER VIII

DIFFICULTIES

Our Common Man, then, believes in God. If God is there, he concludes from natural feelings that he ought to seek Him, if it be possible to have communion with Him, and there are certain other conclusions about the Deity which appear to him to follow naturally from the fact of His existence. Much, in truth, is involved in the fact that there is a God; if, indeed, it be a fact. If we believe that He is, we soon find that we cannot stop short at that belief, but that further confessions of Faith are involved in it. Before, however, going further with the problem which is exercising him, our Common Man, being also a truthful man, confesses that he finds himself faced by

some difficulties. The consideration of these will not only clear his way, but the inquiries that they give rise to, may in the end strengthen the position, which they at first threatened.

One thing which perplexes him, is the apparent insignificance of himself, of the whole human race, of the world, of the Solar system, of all that he has knowledge of, compared with the immensity of the Universe. Walk along the sea-shore, pick up a grain of sand, and in that grain amid miles of beach, you see what our world is amid the vastness of Creation. What we have within our reach, what we may be said to have experiences of, seems so insignificant that we might think we could not draw any conclusions from it regarding the stupendous whole, or its Creator. In this insignificant atom of the Universe, is it not idle for us to attempt to puzzle out the meaning of the immensity with which we are surrounded?

The difficulty thus suggested is not an unnatural one. But when we look closer

into the matter, we find that this perplexity arises from confusing the material world, in all its vastness, with the realm of mind and spirit, and applying to both the same measure. But there is a world of mind and spirit, and there is a world of sense and matter, and the conditions of the one are wholly different from those of the other. On the material side, the comparison of this earth with the immensity of Creation, would be like trying to measure the star depths with a yard-stick. But in the mental and spiritual world, vastness assumes a different aspect. As to space and time, they seem to be conceptions, which, as far as we can grasp them, depend upon conditions within our own minds. In a dream, for example, we appear to pass through the experience of days, in what is often only an instant of time. And with the material elements of our existence, there are joined in inexplicable union, though not fused together, spiritual and emotional conditions which reveal to us, even here, wholly diverse forms of existence in the one Being, and

which led Shakespeare to exclaim, in his well-known and sublime words: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on."

And in the sphere of mind and spirit life, smallness or largeness, expansion to immensity, or contraction to a point, are to be regarded differently from the way in which we would look at material matters. The facts of consciousness are as much facts as those of the senses, and the apparently least of things may partake of the nature of the infinite. The operations of the spirit world, the communication between finite spirits and the Father of spirits, are extant throughout all the vastness of Creation, and are not impeded nor affected by the immensity of material nature, nor by the illimitable nature of space itself. Distance and time and size have no longer to be counted with. You can throw your mind back, and speculate on the conditions of the glacial period of the earth millions of years ago, as readily as you can direct it to the causes of some recent earthquake. In one moment you can project your thoughts to realise the meaning of changes

that you are looking at in the sun's envelope, and in the next, consider a geological formation in an adjoining field. And there seems to be little doubt that one soul can act upon another at a distance from it, by some process that is quite other than a material process. Man, puny man, can embrace immensity in his spiritual and mental grasp, and while materially he is nothing, in his higher capacity, he defines both time and space.

Still more in the moral world, in the realm of virtue, the "Kingdom of Heaven," nothing is insignificant, however little or lowly, which is an emanation of the Supreme All Spirit. The tiniest ray of light, lost apparently and dissipated in the depths of space, is as much the offspring of the sun, as are the sweep of his beams when they are caught up and reflected by shining worlds. And in spiritual matters, wherever you find this beam from Heaven, to the verge of space, if space have a verge, to the end of time, if time have an end,—wherever you find it, there you are in the presence of a

Divine thing. Considerations of vastness or minuteness, transcendent power or weakness, such even as the weakness of man himself, are not relevant. For we need not hesitate to take the case of man, insignificant though he may seem to be, and lost in the immensity of the Universe. If, as we look upon one of our fellow-men, we find in him the spirit of goodness, devotion to the Creator, enthusiasm for all that is noble and true, why there, even in this man, you see the principle of divinity itself. If the ray from God be there, insignificance is clear out of the matter. All are upon one level before the Infinite. If the Divine impulse thrills there, it ennobles the man: he does not belittle it.

Connected with the triviality of mankind, there is another difficulty which perplexes our Common Man. Why are we left in such obscurity about the Unseen God, and our future destiny? Is it, in truth, because we and our world are such an insignificant atom in the Universe, that we are lost in the vasty deep, forgotten perhaps by the ruling Power? But, if indeed, we are

expected to worship our Creator, why all this obscurity? Why are we given the instinct to search Him out if, in truth, He is unsearchable? Wherefore does a merciful Father leave His children to struggle with such perplexities when, as it seems to us, nothing would have been easier than for there to have been an open revelation of God to men, telling them plainly of their duty to Him?

If you ask our Common Man to explain this, he will answer that he cannot fully explain it; not at least by the light of human reason, with which we are now dealing. That our state here is an imperfect and blurred one, is obvious, and this would seem to be one of the defective conditions by which we are surrounded. Many men certainly believe that God has revealed Himself to mankind, and to them personally, in particular. As Solomon says: "They that put their trust in Him, shall understand the truth." Still, we cannot truthfully say that mankind have that plain revelation of God, upon the absence of which the objection is founded.

Yet there is not wanting a partial explanation, at least, derived from the conditions of human life here, which suggests itself to the Common Man. It is obvious that it is the intention of the Creator that all forms of life on this planet (and, probably, wherever in His Universe forms of life exist) should take the deepest interest in their present state of existence, and should be devoted to the claims of that life in which they find themselves placed. This is shown by the instinct for living being one of the strongest planted in our nature. The love of life, looked at in the abstract, has imperfect justification for many of those who, nevertheless, are absolutely governed by it. And, Hamlet's soliloquy notwithstanding, it is not based wholly on the fear of death. We have such an inherent love of and interest in life, that we cling to it through all its trials, and when of itself it would not seem worth prizing. It being, then, the obvious purpose of the Creator that we should be devoted to the claims upon us of our life here, it would be inconsistent with this purpose if there was

placed before men, in the blaze of actual knowledge, the view of God Himself, and of a further state of being, to which men were hurrying through this short stage of existence. For, then, all interest in the affairs of this present world would be gone. Who would have energy to struggle on at his work here, if he had direct knowledge of a wonderful future state immediately at hand? Napoleon as a young man was absorbed in the politics of Corsica, and, had there been no revolution in France, possibly might have remained so all his life. But if, while busied with writing that eager philippic, which, as a youth, he composed upon the condition of his native island, his future career had been revealed to him, would he have cared to finish his letter, or to further nurse his enthusiasm for Paoli?

As well as we can judge, it seems to have been the purpose of Providence, to here only accord to us such knowledge of Himself, and such grounds of expectation as to our future destiny, as is sufficient for the purpose of improving and generally guiding

us here. Thus it is, that need is found and scope is given for the foundation principles of all religions — faith and hope. Some, indeed, hold that the explanation of the mystery is, that this world is a state of probation for mankind, in view of something beyond it. But this at least is plain, that if we knew certainly about God and a future existence, it would be impossible to retain interest in the little affairs of this life. Indeed we see that this is so, by some classes of devotees now, under all forms of religion. They are so possessed by the conviction of the things unseen, that they lose all concern for this life, neglect its work, and give themselves up to the engrossing duty of preparing themselves for the next world. Were all men like these, things could not go on. But this would not be fulfilling the purpose of the Creator, so far as the present life is concerned. Thus muses our inquirer upon this one of our perplexities.

CHAPTER IX

WHENCE THE EVIL?

But our Common Man is faced by a still more serious difficulty as he ponders over the inexplicable problem of evil,—whether it be the evil which men do, or the evil which they suffer. And there seems to be so much of it! He sees evil and sin all around him in the world, and how is he to reconcile this with the rule of a just and merciful God? What is he to say to Sin, the defiance by the creature of his Maker? —Sin whose first appearance among the fallen angels, struck even them with consternation.

> Amazement seized
> All the host of Heaven, back they recoiled, afraid
> At first, and called me *Sin*, and for a sign
> Portentous held me.

What true happiness, some ask, is to be found in the human struggle called life, and where is the moral purpose in it and in Nature? There is no greater obstacle than this problem, to the acceptance of the religious principle among men, and particularly among that considerable proportion of men, who take the surface aspect of questions, can see difficulties readily, but have not the time, nor perhaps the intellectual power, to search below those difficulties and find some explanation of them; or, what is as likely, find that they are of such a nature that man could not expect to wholly solve them, with his present mental capacity. With people who are religious, the perplexing fact forms only one more exercise for the spiritual side of their nature; but with many it is, not unnaturally, a stumbling-block to belief in religion at all.

If we look out on the world, we see a large portion of the human family still sunk in the conditions of savage life. The progress of the race, though real, is slow; the back ranks, at times, seem as if they

would be for ever left behind on the march. Even in the civilised and advanced races, vice and suffering appear to be spread over a wide area; though possibly it appears larger, owing to the fact that the disturbing elements of life attract more attention than the quiet tenor of its ordinary course. Behind all, too, is the disappointing and baffling sense of the futility of things, the insignificance of life, and the black thread which seems to be slipped into the web of each one's destiny. Hence that sickness of heart which comes over some, as they look out upon life, and which of old called forth the despairing exclamation, "Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?" All which, when contemplated without such aid as religion and the higher view of life may be able to offer, dispose men to cynicism and to unbelief in the nobler aspirations of mankind.

Samuel Johnson, we read, in the famous Biography, was discussing with his humble follower Boswell, the recent suicide of the great Lord Clive, which the Moralist attri-

buted to the crimes that he had committed. Boswell ventured to dispute this. "But, Sir, might not this nobleman have felt everything weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable, as Hamlet says?" Johnson: "Nay, if you are to bring in gabble, I'll talk no more. I will not upon my honour." There is no doubt that Boswell was right, and that mere disappointment with life, and in that case, such a distinguished life, was the cause of the violent end of that great career. The truth is that Johnson's outburst was owing to the fact, that no one suffered more than he did from this very spirit of despondency, and he hated to be reminded of it. But whichever view be taken, whether it be a case of crime in a life of so much glory, followed by remorse, or of the mere weariness of human existence, the episode illustrates the futility of man's life, if this world is its end-all, and if no moral purpose can be read into it. With some men doing good and others working ill, and evil befalling the good and bad alike, what, say some, is there to show that the whole of life is not a vain thing,

useless in any aspect and destined to vanish away like the "trace of a cloud," with nothing, after all, in its whole range to show a meaning in it, or to vindicate the cause of "the blameless souls"?

A subject so grave claims earnest thought from the inquirer. Whence the evil, is a question which has perplexed mankind, ever since the human mind began to reflect upon life and its purpose. There is something pathetic in the persistent efforts made by men, from the infancy of the race onwards, to account for this grim fact. Sometimes it is the disquisition of the philosopher, sometimes the simple legends of peoples, coming down from early times. It is discussed by the writers whom we call Heathen,—for example, Plutarch,—with a fulness and discernment that leaves little to be supplemented. At times it is pondered over and accepted simply as a fact that is unaccountable. "Thy footsteps are not known," is an ancient conclusion. As for our Common Man, he does not profess to be able to answer this question, any more than his brother

mortals have been in the past. He does not know the full explanation, and he reflects within himself that, in regard to this as to many other things, if he were to be told it, it is highly probable that his present mental faculties would not be adequate to comprehending it. But nevertheless he struggles for some ray of light on it, enough, at least, to guide him in regard to his duty to God, and to man in this life. For it seems to him that, next to the antecedent question of the existence of Deity, the superstructure of religion very much depends upon the manner in which the question of evil is dealt with. If God does indeed exist, and if He be a Righteous Lord of Creation, then to his mind the other postulates of religion naturally follow. But if we have reason to disbelieve either of those premises, then we are dwellers in darkness indeed.

In this inquiry it is, at times, taken for granted that the only question is whether the existence of evil, in any degree, however small, consorts with the attributes of goodness and wisdom attributed to the Deity.

And as some evil certainly does exist, it seems to be taken for granted that this is irreconcilable with the idea of, and the belief in, a righteous Almighty. The two conceptions, it is held, are destructive of one another. But it seems to our Common Man that the question of importance is, not whether the fact of evil can be wholly explained away, so as to leave the ground clear for the conception of the good God, but whether evil exists in such a manner and in such a degree, as to be inconsistent with the belief in a just and merciful Ruler of the world. If it does not so exist, if, notwithstanding the evil, still the main purpose of nature and the tendency of human affairs testify, on the whole, to beneficent designs in their government, then the fact that there is some evil to be endured, becomes only one more of the many mysteries of Creation. It is one more of those questions in regard to which, as has been said of old, "Verily God hides Himself." No doubt the human heart instinctively rejects the idea of imputing evil to the

Creator; and such an idea is inconsistent with the moral sense, which man finds to be within him. But this alone would not be sufficient to rely upon. If, however, the facts justify this natural instinct, then the complete answer to the question "Whence the evil?" ceases to be of essential importance, at least as far as the guidance of our lives here is concerned. For, then, particular cases of evil would not upset the conclusion of a righteous purpose on the whole. Since we know that there are many things which are beyond our comprehension, it follows that, once we are satisfied of the righteousness of the Creator, it is reasonable for us to believe that there is some good cause for the evil, though it is unknown to us; just as a child ought to think of a kind parent who required it to take some bitter medicine.

The question, therefore, which challenges the inquiry of the Common Man, is whether the world taken as a whole (and in this matter he can only judge by what he sees and knows of in this world), and having regard to the tendencies which are apparent

in its history, and the devolutions in mankind which have taken place, bears testimony to a wise and just Creator, or whether they do the reverse?

On this question there are some considerations which, at the outset, claim his attention. In the first place he sees, notwithstanding the first impressions which the dark passages of life may cause, that pain and evil do not predominate in the world. They claim a part of man's existence, but by no means the whole. In a considerable range of human affairs goodness and happiness prevail; while much of life is passed in a medium condition of content, and a curious compensating element is provided in affairs, owing to which, out of evil and difficulty, healing influences are evolved. Such is the general result of the whole, that few would be unwilling to live their lives over again. In this way Providence, in decreeing the troubles of life, has at the same time infused into those troubles an educating influence and an accompanying compensation. So that many men, and these men of the nobler

type, men who find a purpose in life, discover a meaning and a use even in its crosses. To them it is the darkness which reveals the guiding stars of the Heavens, which are not seen in the warm sunshine. Numbers of men are so constituted by the Creator, as to practically show forth this noble ideal. Further, it has to be observed as to the harsher evils of life, that the fact that misfortunes and tragic events attract so much notice, shows that they are exceptional. No one's attention is called to the raptures of the lovers, to the silent pleasure of the mother nursing her infant, to the sweetness of rest to the toiler, to the glow of satisfaction in the successful worker, to the inspiring moments of the man of genius, to the peace which passeth understanding in the religious mind.

But, moreover, our inquirer sees plainly enough, that the Universe is governed by vast general laws, which act inexorably in fulfilling their mission, as indeed it would seem inevitable that they must, since they have to operate over and to regulate the immensity of Creation. Necessarily these

will cross and conflict in particular cases, especially when they come in contact with beings such as men, who feel that they have power to direct their own actions, and who certainly act as if they had. It would be impossible, except in a state of necessary, all-round perfection, to have those actions free from error; and, as the general laws are unpitying, sad results which make up much of what we call evil in life, must at times follow. Also even apart from the mistakes of men, the operation of all general laws, however beneficial their general scope, must involve occasional and exceptional evils. The typhoon which sweeps away the germs of pestilence from the Eastern village, may unroof the sheds of the villagers.

Why this should be so, why the human race were not made all-perfect and placed in an all-happy world, why this baffling network of agencies, often conflicting with one another, none of us men can say. Certainly our Common Man does not feel himself able to undertake the explanation. Some philosophers, he understands, have held that the

primary conditions of the Universe are such, as to render it impossible for Deity itself to free existence from elements of evil, which appear to be inextricably interwoven in larger principles of good. Thus, they argue, if men are to be free agents at all, not mere machines, Deity itself could not carry out the contradiction of their being unable to do wrong, as well as to do right. If they were so framed that they all must do the one right thing, then the world would be peopled by automata, not by free creatures. There would be no immorality then, certainly; but neither would their be morality as we know it. The essence of goodness would be gone. In truth, it seems to be impossible to have the harmony of the Universe—this mysterious music of the spheres—without some discordant notes. But we poor mortals cannot rightly judge of the eternal symphony, from the imperfect snatches which we get of it in the moment of this life. Take, for example, the King of Terrors, Death. You cannot conceive this world, so well adapted as it is by Nature

to sustain life, to be empty and void of life. Yet, if we are to have life and the propagation of life upon the globe, you cannot avoid its natural complement death, and death becomes, not a needless evil, but the necessary consequence of the succession of life on the planet. It is not to be pretended that this takes away the sadness of death, more especially among men, for the survivors, but it leads us to regard it, not as a capricious cruelty, but as one essential part of a stupendous scheme.

And generally, our inquirer is impressed with the fact that the evil in the world is not directly designed and ordered, but arises incidentally. It follows upon the mismanagement by men of human conditions, and most of it would disappear if that mismanagement, and the consequences of it, could be set right. Thus, though several organs of the body are so constituted as to give pleasure, none are designed to give pain, but pain in them is caused by disease perverting their true use, which disease, if our progenitors had lived lives regulated by the natural laws of health,

and we had done the same, would for the most part die out among men. Disease considered by us the curse of Nature, is in truth her protest against the defying her just laws. It is a matter of common observation that people often indulge themselves without discretion, nothing heeding the lessons of experience, or the warnings of nature, until age comes on and injured nature exacts its penalty. Medical Science tells us that the direst diseases which afflict mankind, are caused by the excesses of men themselves.

> The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Make instruments to plague us.

On the other hand we see men who, owing to self-restraint and sound conditions of life, are able to defy bodily infirmities even to extreme old age. So that there appears to be a purpose behind the consequences which, at first sight, seem to us to come blindly and heedlessly upon hapless mankind, and a moral lesson is thus being taught constantly, if silently, to the human race. For there is the fact ever before us, however we may choose to explain it, that Nature does punish

vice, and that if only we would resist it, it would be well for us and our children.

Much the same considerations apply to a great part of the defects and social wrongs of the world, and of the mental unhappiness of mankind. It is a fact, that most of this class of human ills and sorrows are owing, not so much to the conditions of human life, as to the misuse of those conditions. Nature undoubtedly demands from men both discretion and industry in the conduct of their lives. Nature certainly does punish foolishness and neglect, as well as crime. It is not enough for a man to be amiable; he must also avoid acting in a silly way. The kindly feelings of our times make us averse to human vengeance upon wrong-doing; but Nature goes on upon her old lines, and punishment inevitably follows upon the fault. Hence a great part of the sufferings of mankind. For there can be no question, that if men acted reasonably themselves and justly to others, the face of the world would soon be changed. Many men indeed do act in this wise way. But others are enslaved by

the lower instincts of their nature, and though they are a minority of the whole, human affairs generally are upset by them. If men acted justly, then most of the ills which now mar human life would vanish. We would have war no more, and no more standing armies; no more of the costly agencies for detecting crime, nor of the repulsive machinery now required for punishing it; no more burdensome systems for rescuing the destitute or the vicious; while those who were afflicted by natural causes, or the accidents of life, would only give easy scope for the exercise of the natural benevolence of their fellows. Not less striking would be the deliverance of the lower animals from the cruelty of man, which is now one of the saddest facts of life. All this would come to pass if only it were possible for the forecast of Robert Burns to be realised, and sense and worth to prevail over the world.

If, we say, the Common Man be asked, Why are not all men made thus good? Why has the human race to be disciplined towards virtue, instead of being made virtu-

ous to start with and then kept so? The answer of the Common Man is that he cannot tell. But yet, what challenges his attention? Why, that there appears to be a moral purpose, struggling through it all, to make itself felt. He has before him the impressive fact that Nature's operations working on human life through the ages, and working, as it might seem to a superficial view, blindly, are yet solemnly proclaiming that vice is a mistake. Her plan seems to be to leave man free, but to school him, often by sharp methods, to virtue; to make him learn and take to himself the lesson that wrong-doing degrades him, and will entail retribution in one way or another. As the Angel explains to Adam in *Paradise Lost*:

> He left . . . thy will
> By nature free, not overrul'd by fate
> Inextricable, or strict necessity:
> Our voluntary service he requires,
> Not our necessitated; . . . for how
> Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve
> Willing or no, who will but what they must
> By destiny, and can no other choose?

And it is the fact, if we take a broad view of life and of man's history, that we find human nature does resent in nations, as well as in men, the sinking of its nobler parts in lower passions, and takes vengeance upon those nations who would so degrade it. Though it be soiled for a time, man's nature does vindicate itself in the end.

Our Common Man is also impressed by the consideration, the full scope of which, however, he does not profess to be able to explore, that even evil itself, is not all evil. Some forms of it work out good results, and appear to be necessary to produce those good results. Such is the constitution of things. Pain and struggle often develop noble types of character, which led the sage of old to exclaim that he was to be envied who was *either* courageous or happy, either *fortis or felix*. George Washington, who had his share of the trials of life, says, in a private letter to a friend: "At disappointments and losses which are the effects of Providential acts, I never repine, because I am sure the Allwise Disposer of

events knows better than we do what is best for us, or what we deserve." Dr. Arnold of Rugby, when he was dying, after a painful illness, told his son that he felt the pain he had suffered was a beneficial exercise for him. Indeed, without pain and struggle how could we have fortitude, self-denial, manful endurances, and other qualities which ennoble human nature? You can no more, in our present state, have a true character formed without trials, than you can have a body well-developed without exercise. Labour, if imposed on man as a curse, rightly taken develops into a gift, which the wisest of men have blessed. The selfish instincts of millions of individuals, each working for himself, in a community, are in the outcome found to be so overruled, that the general result is the common good of all. The vices of some men call forth and give scope for the virtues of others. Though all this does not prevent pain from being felt and vice from being vice, it has a significance which challenges the attention of the Common Man.

But further, he learns from history an impressive fact, that in the leading civilisations of the world the human race is surely, if slowly, getting better. He cannot read its pages without seeing that evil is gradually waning, and good strengthening, and that the principle of "Conscience," always of some weight in human affairs, tends more and more to challenge the supremacy of brute force. The evil passions of men are still there, but they are coming more under the restraint of the moral sense. It is not that new and loftier principles of morality have been discovered—for some of the noblest of these have been announced from the first by the Prophets and the leaders of men—as that those principles are, impelled by a power which appears to be inherent in them, growing more and more into a living force among mankind. And this, notwithstanding the temporary breaks that mark the general advance, particularly in the decline of civilisations. Civilisations rise and fall away, and with them often both the vices and the virtues which may have marked

them ; but in the new civilisations the virtues generally reappear, often strengthened and improved, while the vices are left behind. The whole progress of humanity may be slow, the slackness of the current may be increased by periods of back-water, but the onward movement is unmistakable.

We can illustrate this moral advance by the course of our Western civilisation. To take, for example, the most savage manifestation of our nature—war. We have still war with us, though there is a feeling growing among advanced peoples, silently and often imperceptibly, like the advancing dawn, that men ought to be ashamed of it ; and in some cases arbitration has been tried successfully in its place. But even where war continues, its ferocity is being mitigated. In early times the fate of the vanquished was the wholesale butchery of the men, the levelling to the ground of their city, and the carrying away of the women and the children into cruel slavery. The brilliant leader of the Greeks, Achilles, seizes the child of his rival and dashes out

his brains. In 1870 one of the bitterest wars of the century was fought between the French and the Germans, but not a woman or child was knowingly injured on either side, and the civilised world would have been shocked if a single outrage, such as those which were common in ancient times, had been perpetrated. Personal slavery, once an unquestioned condition of the social state, and accepted as such by philosophers, is now repudiated by the conscience of all civilised peoples. Being unrighteous in itself, it worked, through natural causes, a retribution upon nations which maintained it, and involved them in evils of the social state that often, in the end, hastened their downfall. Such was its lesson to the value of justice in the relations of mankind. The sheer force of this growing enlightenment drove slavery out of the United States, despite all the efforts of vested interest, backed up by the opportunism of time-serving politics.

Piracy and robbery, so long as they were not directed against one's own clan, were not

regarded as dishonourable in the early ages. Indeed, the sentiment of compassion for those who are not connected with us, may be said to have been unknown to the ancients; but now there is a common feeling among civilised men, that it is their duty to care for the sick, the aged, and the needy, whatever may be their nationality or colour. Torture, once a regular part of the penal system, is now so repugnant to the feelings of men, that any street mob in Europe would be ashamed of it. A cruel spirit marked the excesses of the French Revolution, but in their wildest moments the Sans-culottes never thought of torture. For the people's amusement in the old days, the slaughter of men in the public shows was fashionable. Events of civil importance, as well as festive occasions in Rome, were graced by gladiatorial shows, at which the more men who were slain, the better and more festive was the entertainment considered. Now the opinion of Europe frowns upon the Bull Fights of backward Spain. In early times woman, being the weaker, was regarded by man as

an inferior, and often as a slave. Now she is recognised as an equal; only that men show her more consideration, because she is weaker. Christianity has given to the world, in the Virgin Mary, the holiest, purest, and most touching revelation of womanhood, and a large portion of the human race reverence this high ideal. Its influence spreads, too, over countries where its authority is not directly acknowledged, and the position of woman is permanently raised over the civilised globe. Even the sufferings of animals are beginning to engage men's thoughts, and in most countries to-day, there are numbers of thinking people who are striving to mitigate those sufferings. The case of slavery has been mentioned, but generally also it may be said, that a retrospect of history shows that the decline and fall of nations can be traced to the retributive effects of some national vice or wrong, some violation of those eternal laws which enjoin right-doing on men, and which, if obeyed, foster both the happiness and the stability of the race.

Not only does evil tend to diminish, but it is found that good shows a tendency to grow out of natural conditions which do not primarily demand it, and where it is not necessary for their chief purpose. For example, the union of the sexes, primarily designed for the continuation of the race, as it works out its full purpose, gives rise to the highest forms of disinterested affection—the abiding love of husband and wife into old age, and through all the trials of sickness and incapacity in the beloved object; the lifelong love of children by parents and parents by children, only growing stronger as years advance, and when the need of parental devotion has long since passed away. And from these natural conditions, developed into moral principles, we find springing the home and its morality, that centre and fountain of human virtues. With such far-reaching developments has the Ruling Power of this world invested among mankind the (at first sight) merely animal instinct of the sexes. It is interesting to observe that an analogous upward movement

can be discerned struggling through all organic life, in a continuous bettering of its various forms and rising to higher developments. We must not forget, too, that much of the virtue and the heroism of the race, pursues its course among the lowly, whose lives are unknown and who rest in unvisited graves, enabling millions of men and women face the ills that are allotted to them, with silent heroism, and out of evil to wrest good.

When, therefore, the Common Man views this world and the course of man's history in it, he finds a predominance of good over evil, a continuous, if slow thinning out of the bad element in it, together with a parallel growth of the good. In order to realise the significance of this latter movement, let us suppose that the growth had been equally plain the other way. Let us suppose that the lust for war, and the cruelty of war, were ever growing stronger and spreading among mankind; that the principle of personal slavery was, age after age, becoming better established as the proper form of civil life; that the feeling which prompts the care of the sick and the

helpless was plainly weakening and dying out as the generations went on; that ferocity was more and more developing in public amusements, and torture in penal systems; that women were sinking slowly back into a condition of servitude, and that we had only before us the appalling prospect of a long drawn-out decline of the world into an unknown future of decadence and evil. What, then, would we have been driven to think of this world and the Power that controlled it? What could we then say to the Moral sense in man, and the Power who inspired it? What a retrospect and what an outlook would then have been presented to mankind—a retrospect of waning goodness, and an outlook of ever-growing vice!

Thus then does our Common Man ponder over the evil that is in the world. He cannot profess to give any complete explanation of it. In Creation generally he sees forces of order and a set purpose, combined with a general tendency towards good; but in the baffling immensity of things, and the rough and ready working of vast natural laws

operating upon free agents, evil in particular cases, it seems, must needs occur. Why it should be so is a matter which is outside his comprehension. All that reflection and inquiry can do for him, is to show him the outline of some purpose which Providence has infused into evil, and some compensating influences that are attached to it. This world of ours, presents to him the appearance of a Creation which got in some way partially marred in its making, so that designs originally beneficent, got turned from their first and direct course, and mixed up with perverting elements and evils that are alien to their primary purpose. The conclusion of the whole matter with him is to incline him not to Atheism, but towards religion. For he cannot help thinking, that to impart to our present life a meaning which would be intelligible to the moral sense and the faculties which God has given him, there must be something beyond it for us mortals, which in our present state it is not given to us to comprehend, though it is given to us to feel its need and to look for it. Thus as

the purpose of the world, on the whole, points to just judgment and also to beneficence in the Creator, the problem of evil, baffling though it be to the search for a complete explanation, so far from destroying the belief of the Common Man in a righteous Providence, tends to support it. What he sought for as a shield to protect his faith, becomes a sword to aid him in the contest.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY

The difficulties, then, which his inquiry brings before the mind of the Common Man do not prevent him from holding to his belief in God; not that he does not feel those difficulties, but because he thinks that he must face greater difficulties if he disbelieved wholly, or dissolved his belief in a vague abstraction, or contented himself with saying that he did not know what to think, and so would dismiss the subject from his thoughts altogether. He is the more satisfied with his conclusion, when he calls to mind that, if it is not given to his intellect to explore to its source, and to comprehend in its entirety, the conception of Deity, no more can the most learned philosopher claim to solve the

mystery of the Universe in any one of its manifestations to man.

As for the various attributes of Deity which metaphysicians and theologians have examined with a learning and depth of thought to which the Common Man is a stranger, his conviction is, that all which it is necessary for him to know and to feel, is involved in and follows from the existence of the Power which he believes presides over Creation, and is the source of the moral principle which has inspired mankind. He cannot, in his own mind, place limits to what he conceives must be the Omnipotence and Omniscience of this great First Cause, nor confine His presence and His power to any time or place. Milton's words express what he instinctively feels :

> His Omnipresence fills
> Land, sea and air, and every kind that lives
> Fomented by His virtual power and warned.

If there be a God, it seems impossible to the Common Man to hold that He takes no notice of, and has provided no directing principles for His Creation, animate, and

inanimate, and that His influence remains unmingled with its wide expanse. The fancy of one of the ancients that the gods did indeed exist, but only for themselves, that they regarded the course of the world with indifference, and, as for poor mankind, took no heed of them at all,—this seems to the Common Man to be wholly unworthy of any reasonable conception of the Deity. It gets rid, indeed, of the difficulty of denying the conclusion which we naturally draw from the observation of Creation and its working, that there is a God; but it robs such a conclusion of significance by banishing the Deity from all concern in its affairs. If you hold that there is an intelligent Power which presides over Nature, and by various agencies directs its course, you assert an intelligible position. Or if you hold that there is no such power, but that things are impelled along by some inherent influence, by unconscious streams of tendency, or in some other unknown way, you at least assert a position which is not contradictory with itself. But if you say that there is an

intelligent Power above Creation, the source of our souls as well as of our bodies, but that He does not care about the work of His own hands, and notices it not, unless it be, according to that ancient flippant fancy, to be diverted by the struggles and perplexities of his creatures,—if you say this, you seem to the Common Man to announce a speculation, which is the most unreasonable and the most repulsive to the human conscience, of the many theories which have been propounded to solve the enigma of the Universe. It ascribes to the All Father, a character which humanity would condemn as disgraceful in the meanest parent upon the earth. And if there is a conscious Ruler of the Universe, the Common Man instinctively arrives at the conclusion which Locke declared long ago: "Every one, that hath a true idea of God and worship, will assent to this proposition, 'that God is to be worshipped.'"

Such is the religion of our Common Man. It is based upon a reasonable foundation, but he admits that it is not capable of demonstration to its full extent, as a matter

of logical proof. As far as his intellect is concerned, he accepts the conclusion which appears to him to be true. He acts upon strong probability in this, as in other grave affairs of life. He may have heard that high authority has condemned such a course, upon the ground that, while you are justified in acting upon probability in the affairs of the world, because in them you must act in some way, there is no need to have recourse to probability to guide our footsteps in matters of faith, because in them there is no need to act at all. But he denies this distinction. He affirms that he has as much need to arrive at some conclusion about religion, as he has to walk wisely in the affairs of this world. In this case as well as in that, if you do not act, you must pay the penalty of not acting. If you settle down to not believing in the Creator, you must accept the void which such a blank in human needs and aspirations entails. And it is not that the Common Man is possessed by the selfish anxiety to make himself safe in another life. It is that human nature imperatively demands

now and here, in this present state, the light and support of some form of communion with its Maker, and that in the result, human nature is proved to be the better and the stronger for it. The voice of the race demands nothing less than this; in imperfect stammering tones, at times perhaps, it speaks, but still it demands it.

You cannot, then, get rid of this question by saying that you will arrive at no conclusion at all upon it, and leave your mind a blank with regard to it. From its nature, it does not admit of being shelved in this way. The negative develops into a positive. Not to believe is to believe. When a man says that he does not believe in the intelligent creation and direction of the Universe, then, since the Universe is there and goes on its even way, in reality he affirms that it is kept going without intelligent direction. And though he may claim to say this because he does not know, yet all the while he is acting as if he did know—did know that there was nothing in it. He takes his stand upon a negation, but he never thinks of proving that negation.

And further, when he tells you that you have nothing to believe, he in effect bids you live as if you had nothing to believe. The Common Man considers that this is quite as difficult a position as his own. Is he then, indeed, to look upon all earthly existence as the result of heedless powers of Nature, a blind yet fateful evolution, with no purpose here or hereafter, but the whole turbid crowd of life, matter, and events rolling aimlessly about, like a dust cloud in the desert?

True, faith, though founded upon reason, is only the assurance of things not to be grasped by the senses. The Common Man, as has been said, admits that the ultimate postulate upon which his faith rests is insoluble by mere reason. And if the other mysteries of Nature, if the problems of science, were capable of clear intellectual definition, the Common Man confesses that it would be an argument against his faith, that it alone was, in the last resort, faced by an enigma. But in every science, as well as in religion, you come to a point where you can only stop and wonder. In all you meet the boundary line,

which it is not given to the human intellect to pass. This ignorance does not prevent the man of science from dealing with its problems as far as he can, and to the extent of such intelligence as he possesses in regard to them. After he reaches that point he is blocked as a matter of knowledge; but up to that point, he draws such conclusions as he can and acts upon them, at times threading his way by speculation only. Often in his investigations he proceeds upon the assumption that certain facts are so, though he has only reason to think it probable, and could not prove it. Afterwards, perhaps, he finds out in some unexpected way that they really are so. But he never proposes to throw over science because a great deal of it is to him a riddle, nor because he has at times to assume things in his search after truth.

Neither, then, is the Common Man prepared to throw up his religion because part of it is inexplicable to him; but he, too, goes on prosecuting his inquiries in it as far as he can go. When he remembers the limitations of human knowledge, he is little

affected by all the criticisms with which the principle of faith has been assailed. Indeed, when he regards the imposing fabric of the religious principle in man, as it has stood through all the ages, and amid all the changes of different civilisations, he is struck by the fact, of how little its foundations have been shaken by forty centuries of criticism. It reminds him of what travellers tell us of some of the Pyramids of Egypt, which have been partly despoiled by rude hands in later ages. When you look upon one of these and see the stones and débris that are strewn about, you think how much must have been torn down; but when you turn to the everlasting Pyramid itself, it seems as if nothing had been taken away.

There remains a further consideration by which the Common Man is impressed. In secular science man can only do his best with his mental faculties, and go as far as they will carry him, groping on a little further, perhaps, where speculation may give him a helping but uncertain lead. But in regard

to religious faith, when the reasoning powers of man direct him towards Deity, he finds his nature gifted with natural impulses, inherent instincts, all ready to catch up and respond to the conclusion which his intellect was pointing to. While the spiritual power would be imperfect without the intellectual basis, the intellectual process is completed and made effective by the spiritual capacity with which man is naturally gifted, and which he finds ready, and adapted to follow the lead which his intellect gives. We have therefore a better justification for the conclusions of our intellect in religion, and more reason to trust them than we have in general science. The astronomer, when from his calculations he is convinced that there is a new world at a point which he can indicate in space, does not hesitate to hold to his belief that it is there, though it has never been seen, and though man's direct vision scans, in the search, the awful abyss in vain. Even so, and not less so, does the Common Man hold to his belief in the Unseen God.

The question remains to us, Is the

Common Man right? Is he acting in a reasonable manner? Would he be wiser if he resigned himself to unbelief, and, giving up the struggle, was satisfied to look for such satisfaction from this present life as it is able to afford him?

This is the old question, the question of all time. The human heart has ceaselessly asked it, and will ask it till the last heart beats in the last man. It was considered in a touching manner by Job, seven centuries before Christ. But the "wiser" type of men, using that word in its ancient sense, will ever incline to answer it in the one way. We may illustrate this view by taking the summary of the problem which is given in the *Wisdom of Solomon.* From this book we learn, that the conflicts of thought and moral principles, which its author mused over in his Eastern home more than two thousand years ago, were the same as challenge us now, and were resolved by him in the same way as thinking men generally resolve them to-day. He considers in different parts of his meditations the imperfection

of human knowledge, and its inability to grasp the methods of the Almighty. We give the substance of his speculations, omitting some portions which are not necessary to the present argument, and transposing some passages from different parts of the writing, so as to better illustrate the text.

He asks: "What man is he that can know the counsel of God? The earthly tabernacle weigheth down the soul, and the mind that museth upon many things. And hardly do we guess aright the things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us. But the things that are in Heaven who hath searched out? And Thy counsel who hath known, except Thou give wisdom."

He complains of thoughtless people that they knew not their Maker who "had breathed into them a living spirit," but that they counted life as a pastime and "our time here as a market for gain." He reproaches some thinkers of his age, because they ascribed the government of the world to this natural force or that, and to any

thing, but what he terms the "Mighty Maker." He exclaims: "Surely vain are all men by nature who are ignorant of God, and cannot out of the good things that are seen know Him that is, neither by considering the works, did they acknowledge the Workmaster. But deemed either fire, or wind, or the circle of the stars, or the Lights of Heaven, to be the gods which govern the world. But if they were astonished at *their* power and virtue, let them understand by them, how much mightier is He that made them." And for his part he says, that wisdom, "heavenly wisdom hath taught him: for in her is an understanding spirit, holy, loving the thing that is good, ready to do good, kind to man, stedfast, overseeing all things. For she is the breath of the power of God and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness."

Finally his conclusion is: "By the greatness and beauty of the creatures, proportion-

ally, the Maker of them is seen. And to know Thee O God is perfect righteousness, yea, to know Thy power is the root of immortality."

In the opening portion of his book he summarises the conclusions at which he had already in his own mind arrived. The learned say that it is doubtful who this wise man was, though his wisdom was ascribed to Solomon. But most readers will agree that, when the following meditation on the mystery of our life, and its true solution, was breathed into the soul of mortal man, a wisdom as great as that of Solomon was there.

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON ON THE PROBLEM OF LIFE

Those who are without God said, reasoning with themselves, but not aright: Our life is short and tedious, and in the death of man there is no remedy: neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave.

For we are all born at an adventure: and we shall be hereafter as though we had never been: for the breath in our nostrils is as smoke, and a little spark

in the moving of our heart. Which being extinguished, our body shall be turned into ashes, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air, and our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud, and shall be dispersed as a mist, that is driven away with the beams of the sun, and overcome with the heat thereof. Come on therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures like as in youth. Let no flower of spring pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered.

Such things they did imagine and were deceived. As for the mysteries of God they knew them not, neither hoped for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls. For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. And the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God: No torment shall touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction.

But they are in peace!

THE END

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